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MARY HAYS: THE MAKING OF A FEMINIST WRITER

BY

PAMELA J. BENTLEY

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Mary Hays: The Making of a Feminist Writer

submitted by Pamela J. Bentley

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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DEDICATION

With gratitude, to my parents, Robert and Jeanne Bentley, without whose support or encouragement I could never have written this thesis or achieved this degree.

ABSTRACT

Mary Hays (1760-1843) was, during the 1790s, a member of the intellectual group, the English Jacobins. Her thoughts and writing were influenced by her upbringing and beliefs as a Rational Dissenter, the writing and ideas of other English Jacobins, and her own feminism. Along with her friend, Mary Wollstonecraft, she played a large role in the production of political and feminist writings during this decade.

Hays put her political and feminist ideas into fictional form in two novels, Memoirs of Emma Courtney published in 1796 and in The Victim of Prejudice in 1799. In the first novel, she details her beliefs in the power of sensibility and in the possibility of passion co-existing with reason. She further challenges the accepted customs of courtship and marriage. The structure of this novel, particularly in its use of epistolarity, reflects her purposes. Her second novel, The Victim of Prejudice is a criticism of man's hypocritical role in defining chastity at the expense of woman's freedom and reputation. In both novels, using various means, Hays actively engages her readers in the experiences of the heroines.

Many of the ideas Hays developed throughout her life and in her writing were introduced in her 1793 collection Letters and Essays: Miscellaneous and Moral. This collection was made up of essays on philosophical subjects and short stories meant to educate, which often introduced feminist arguments. Also during the 1790s, Hays wrote an explicitly feminist tract, An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of the Women (1798). This work continued the challenge Wollstonecraft began with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), and refuted arguments made by anti-feminists opposing the advancement and equal education of women. After the turn of the century, Hays's literary contributions took the form of two biographical dictionaries of women: Female Biography in 1803 and Memoirs of Queens in 1821. These collections continued Hays's presentation of feminist ideas.

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BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

Mary Hays was, and is still, considered to be one of the primary feminists of the 1790s in Britain, second only to Mary Wollstonecraft. Gina Luria's description of Hays is apt: "the least remembered, and with Mary Wollstonecraft, the most maligned today, Mary Hays engaged more actively than any of her sister Jacobins in the various creative milieux of the period" (Luria, 1972, 5). Although she lived eighty-three years, most of Hays's work, certainly her best-known and most controversial work, was written and published during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Her literary production was substantial and revolutionary in her time, yet Luria's unpublished dissertation is the only concentrated study of Hays. The recent growing interest in her work and ideas is a result of the continuing project of feminist literary historians to unearth and re-construct the ideas of early feminists who have been ignored for so long that much of their work and influence has been lost.

Born in 1760, Hays lived in an age of intense intellectual conflict. Mary Hays knew and was influenced by many whose names have survived into the twentieth century because of their contributions to philosophy, political thought, and literature. She, however, tends to be forgotten in accounts of the late eighteenth century, overshadowed by the presence of those contemporaries. For this reason, it is necessary to

provide some biographical background before dealing with Hays's ideas and writing.

Hays was born into a middle class family of Rational Dissenters; consequently, Dissenting views on religion and politics are central to Hays's later thinking. By the time she was nineteen, her father had died and she was living with her mother and several siblings in Southwark. At the local Dissenting meetings, Hays came to know John Eccles with whom she carried on a short but passionate literary romance. Their parents disapproved of the match, so for a year Eccles and Hays corresponded in secret, until Hays's mother and Eccles's father, realizing the tenacity of the pair, finally agreed to the marriage.

Unfortunately for the two lovers, before their wedding could take place Eccles became ill and died of a fever. In her grief, Mary Hays turned to reading, particularly in religious subjects. Little is known of her activities during this next decade, until the appearance of the pamphlet "Cursory Remarks" in 1791, which she wrote under the pen name Eusebia. It was this pamphlet that gained Hays the respect and friendship of men such as George Dyer and William Frend.

In 1792, Hays read A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and "was profoundly affected by Wollstonecraft's work. Her personal copy of the first edition ... is scored with underlinings, exclamation points, and questions written in Hays's hand" (Luria, 1972, 163). She consequently wrote to Wollstonecraft and after Wollstonecraft's return from France, the two women established a friendship that lasted until Wollstonecraft's death. Wollstonecraft was a member of an intellectual circle which

centred around the liberal publisher, Joseph Johnson, who published her and William Godwin, as well as many of the other radicals of the period. Hays soon also became part of this select group and so was steeped in the political and social revolution in thought. In 1794, Hays wrote to William Godwin asking to borrow his copy of An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue (1793), which had already become a fundamental text in political philosophy. Thus began the intellectual friendship between Hays and Godwin. She wrote long letters to him detailing her thoughts and feelings; he most often answered her during personal visits. He also provided her with the model for the character of Mr. Francis in her novel The Memoirs of Emma Courtney.

During this same period, Hays began her unsuccessful "pursuit" of William Frend, a prominent Rational Dissenter who had resigned his position in the Church of England after realizing and declaring his belief in Unitarianism, and who was eventually expelled from his tutorship at Cambridge for his protests against the exclusion of non-Church of England members from Cambridge. Frend had written to her following the publication of the pamphlet "Cursory Remarks" and presumably it was later when they met in person that Hays fell in love with Frend. Unfortunately not much is known about Frend's feelings about the matter and a record of the affair exists only in Hays's letters to Godwin and in her fictionalized version in Emma Courtney, but this one-sided romance and her use of it in her writing became the favorite focus of Hays's

contemporary critics and those since. In her biography of Wollstonecraft, Claire Tomalin mentions this episode in Hays's life.

> Mary Hays did make life difficult for herself by putting into practice her belief in sexual equality in a way that rendered her vulnerable to ridicule. She pursued men noisily, persistently, and (worst of all) unsuccessfully ... [and her behaviour] lent weight to generalizing arguments about the sort of women who took up feminism, and their motives in doing so (Tomalin, 241).

One would think that now these criticisms would be given little weight, but as evidenced by Tomalin's choice of adverbs ("noisily, persistently, and unsuccessfully"), a woman stepping out of the bounds of traditional courtship practices is still regarded with disapproval or derision. Dale Spender in her book Mothers of the Novel points out that Hays's "rebellion lay in her insistence on women's emotional and sexual identity and in her advocacy of women's right to sexual fulfillment" (Spender, 1986, 265). One could add a desire for intellectual fulfillment and identity to this rebellion, for it was as vital to Hays as it was to the heroine of her novel that a lover should treat her as an intellectual equal. This insistence on fulfillment and identity continues to be a tenet or demand of feminists. I will deal with this in more detail in the second chapter of this thesis in which I will be discussing The Memoirs of Emma Courtney.

Hays was by this time living on her own in London, not far from Godwin and Wollstonecraft, earning her living by her writing (her Letters and Essays was published in 1793) and by reviewing for the periodicals. This was probably the most rewarding and definitely the most intellectually exciting period of Hays's life, despite her unhappy romance

with Frend. Her friendships with both Godwin and Wollstonecraft continued and she frequently visited Wollstonecraft during her decline following the birth of the couple's daughter, Mary. She also wrote the obituary for Wollstonecraft that appeared in September 1797 in the Monthly Magazine, speaking of her warmly as both a friend and an intellectual.

After Wollstonecraft's death, Hays continued her advocacy of feminist reform on her own, but met with more and more resistance from the growing conservative reaction to the French Revolution and to the many radical ideas that arose from it. Hays produced relatively little after the turn of the century, although she retained her feminist and political views. She turned her talents most successfully to biography, a project which was feminist in itself because of the dominance of men at the time in the field of biography. She also wrote "juvenile" fiction. Earlier examples of this genre can be seen in the moral tales addressed to young acquaintances in her Letters and Essays. Burton R. Pollin has described these later works as written in "the style of Hannah More" (Pollin, 281), which probably prompted M. Ray Adams' remark that "The few facts unearthed about her later life show her feminism unimpaired, though her radicalism otherwise was subdued to an active benevolence among the labouring poor" (Adams, 103ff). As with her earlier years, little is known about Hays's last twenty years. She knew many of the new generation of Romantic writers, was a friend of Henry Crabb Robinson, with whom she corresponded, and was disliked by Coleridge who was responsible for the much quoted description of Hays as "a thing, ugly and

petticoated". Luria calls attention to letters Mary Hays wrote to Robinson which "reveal her keen interest in the growing body of Romantic literature with which her former friends and acquaintances, including Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Lamb, made their reputation" (Luria, 1972, 13). Despite her withdrawal from writing, Hays continued to keep abreast of contemporary literature and ideas.

As a writer and thinker, Mary Hays has been much maligned when not dismissed completely by literary critics and historians as well as by conservative opponents to her ideas and the ideas of the intellectual group of which she was a part. Until recently, she has been included in literary surveys, if at all, as one of the many female sentimental novelists, and introduced largely to ridicule her conduct and that of her heroine in Memoirs of Emma Courtney. She fares somewhat better in various biographies of others in her circle, although even by Wollstonecraft's biographers she is occasionally represented as a parasite, a clinging disciple of both Godwin and Wollstonecraft. Emily Sunstein, in A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft, describes Hays in passing as "lugubrious and clinging" (326) and as "rather a climber, and in some ways a less attractive and gifted Mary Wollstonecraft" (297). Mary Hays, when mentioned, is often described as unoriginal or as simply a parrot of the many ideas that she absorbed from the great minds around her. Although unavoidably influenced by these ideas and the general climate of the last decade of the eighteenth century, Hays's strength was in her ability to synthesize so many different elements of

thought into one that she used to support and strengthen her own feminism.

Like Wollstonecraft and many of the other women writers of her generation, Hays admired and used Rousseau's ideas, particularly on the subject of sensibility and the importance of feelings. Katharine M. Rogers argues convincingly in her Feminism in Eighteenth Century England that this stress on sensibility, which to a modern reader may seem overwrought and sickeningly sentimental, could "justly assert the value of personal feelings as opposed to abstract law ..." (Rogers, 120). Rogers argues that this re-evaluation of sentiment was fundamental to the development of feminist thought.

> This respect [for valid personal feelings] was particularly valuable in a time of patriarchal attitudes and institutions, when women were pressured to conform to others' wishes, not to pay attention to their own ... Moreover, interest in women's feelings led to identification with their point of views, and this in turn promoted an articulation of feminist opinions which would not have been thought of in a male-oriented tradition (Rogers, 43).

Mary Poovey, however, in The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, points out the disadvantages of sensibility and the use made of the sentimental novel by feminists like Wollstonecraft and Hays. Writing of Wollstonecraft's Maria, she states:

> Instead the *kind* of feeling that was appropriate to this genre was precisely the kind that aborted her political purpose. For the emotionalism that had so long crippled Wollstonecraft, along with the sentimental "structure" developed to dramatize such "finer sensations," were deeply implicated in the values — indeed, the very organization — of bourgeois society (Poovey, 96).

Hays and her writing were also susceptible to this tension between the liberating potential of sensibility from women and the difficulty of developing a radical political and feminist view while using the genre of sentimental novels. Hays, however, was earlier aware of the conflict than was Wollstonecraft and also more insistent on the value of sensibility.

Both Hays and Wollstonecraft combined this articulation of feelings and sentiment, derived largely from Rousseau, with religious beliefs grounded in Rational Dissent. Hays was more firmly associated with this background than Wollstonecraft, in that Hays was raised in a Dissenting family while Wollstonecraft was exposed to Dissenting ideas only as an adult; accordingly, Dissent is more fundamental in Hays's thought as a whole. Hays's family attended their local Dissenting chapel regularly, and religion seems to have played a large role in their family and social life. She defends the importance of this role in her pamphlet addressed to Gilbert Wakefield in 1792. But even more important are the Rational Dissenters' beliefs in individuality, freedom of enquiry, and the centrality of "candour" to their ethics. All these are very prominent in Hays's feminism. To the Rational Dissenters, religion could be and should be subjected to a rational examination of its tenets, as should any other philosophical system of beliefs. To encourage and accomplish this examination, enquiry was expected, almost required. No authority should be unchallenged simply because it was powerful or founded in tradition. Wollstonecraft shows her support of this tenet when she suggests in A Vindication, that parents should not use their affection as "a pretext to tyrranize" (Wollstonecraft, 150-151) and that the expectation

and the granting of blind obedience of children to their parents is harmful to the development of the child (Wollstonecraft, 153).

This argument is of course easily extended to the relationship of man and woman, as well as that of the church and its adherents. In fact, for many dissenters, dissociating themselves from the church was a type of rebellion, or at least a protest against the status quo. As A.D. Gilbert states in Religion and Society in Industrial England,

> becoming a Nonconformist could be a symbolic rejection of the mores and values of a social system which ascribed status largely in terms of inherited advantages of landed wealth and family background (Gilbert, 84).

Though the Dissenters could not dissociate themselves from the state in as decisive a manner as they did from the Church of England, they continually criticized the monopoly of power in government, as in the church, by men of inherited privilege. They advocated reform and supported first the American revolution and later (considered even more dangerous by their opponents) the French revolution. This challenge to aristocratic advantage was strengthened by the largely middle-class composition of the Dissenting movement and their belief in the right as well as the duty of every citizen to be allowed "an active function in the State itself" (Lincoln, 216). Hays used this demand for social duty and responsibility to challenge the restrictions placed on the middle-class woman, with which she was of course very familiar.

The prominence of political philosophy in the independent Dissenting academies established in the 1780s and 1790s strengthened the political aspect of Dissent. Anthony Lincoln asserts the centrality of

political philosophy in these academies in his book Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763-1800 (Lincoln, 33-34). Their study of politics profoundly affected Dissenters' daily lives, but the reverse was also true. As Lincoln points out, "they were by far the most politically minded people of their times, in that they daily encountered obstacles which could only be justified or condemned in political terms" (Lincoln, 17). For many like Godwin, this grounding in philosophy obtained as part of a Dissenting education became the backbone of their ideas and it also led to the involvement of many of them in literary production, either in the form of books or in the many periodicals of the day, most of which were edited by Dissenters (Lincoln, 39-43). Periodicals were an important political forum and provided an opportunity for women to participate in the debates. Much of the writing was done anonymously, always a favorite form for women, who had to be much more concerned with reputation than did the men, and who also had no precedents of public identities available as models. Both Hays and Wollstonecracft were involved in periodicals and the debates published in them. Thus, the Rational Dissenters formed the core of the political radicals in the 1790s who were eventually given the label "English Jacobins", after the faction involved in the French Revolution. "The Church had called them 'republicans', the mob had agreed and 'republicans' the Dissenters remained until the progress of events made 'Jacobins' a more modish form of vituperation" (Lincoln, 256).

William Godwin was a prominent name in the mostly male field of political philosophy and his ideas are essential to an understanding of

Mary Hays. As mentioned above, his Political Justice (1793) quickly became the foundation for much of the radical thought of the period. In it, he outlines his views on government and morality, and the connections between the two. As Peter H. Marshall points out, "he insists there is an indissoluble connection between politics and ethics. As there is no concern of a rational being which falls outside the province of morality, politics must be 'the proper vehicle of a liberal morality' and political enquiry 'strictly speaking a department of the science of morals.'" (Marshall, 98 quoting Political Justice, vol. 1, vii, 80). His views tie into the Dissenting belief in the social aspect of religion, the political duty of the individual, and in another fashion, into the feminist tenet that Wollstonecraft states particularly strongly in her novels, that the "personal is political".

Godwin's views on equality are as progressive for his time as Wollstonecraft's. He feels that "Since existing inequalities are entirely the result of social arrangements, it follows that there are no grounds for hereditary distinctions and slavery, and the improvement 'to be desired for the one is to be desired for the other'" (Marshall, 95, quoting from Political Justice, 105). "The other" includes "Indians, negroes and women" (Marshall, 95). Obviously this criticism of social arrangements is essential to a feminist critique of society, particularly one such as Wollstonecraft's and Hays's who, as well as many of the other feminists of the day, made the argument that women were only inferior to men because of their lack of education and exclusion from meaningful, intellectual pursuits. That Hays made use of this argument and was

viewed by conservatives as belonging to the group of radicals who did so is evidenced in the opening sentence of the review of her Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of the Women in the Monthly Magazine in April 1799. The reviewer writes,

> This is one of the impertinent effusions of modern theorists and visionary reformers, who, instead of attributing the miseries and distresses of life to the real cause, the wickedness and mischievous passions of human nature, which they deny the existence of, or assert to be remediable, by leaving Nature to herself, without fettering her with prejudices of education, ascribe them to the incorrect organization of society, and the abuses of established institutions (310).

The connection with Godwin's theories is unmistakable, as is the reviewer's disgust with this approach.

Godwin's most controversial view, and one which is still considered revolutionary, is that government is a necessary evil, that can and should be abolished once humankind has attained sufficient moral growth. "In his politics, Godwin is thus primarily motivated by his concern with morality. As man [and woman] is a product of his circumstances and a morally progressive being, he wants to find the kind of society which would fit the moral man" (Marshall, 103). The theory put forth by the English Jacobins was that once the corrupting or unequal institutions of society were reformed or in Godwin's view, abolished, man's true moral nature could blossom. Hays applied this idea to the relationship of men and women in that once women were given the chance to improve morally and intellectually, their improvement could not help but improve that of the men around them and most importantly of their children. Jane Rendall asserts that the "theme of moral regeneration of the citizen

through the influence of the family became an extremely powerful one" (Rendall, 17). This belief in moral regeneration is also supported by Wollstonecraft, who writes in A Vindication, "I, therefore, will venture to assert, that till women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks" (Wollstonecraft, 40).

Wollstonecraft also suggests repeatedly that a relationship founded on reason, mutual respect, and friendship is much stronger and richer than one based on passion which would soon fade: "When the husband ceases to be a lover ... her desire of pleasing will then grow languid, or become a spring of bitterness; and love, perhaps, the most evanescent of all passions, gives place to jealousy or vanity" (Wollstonecraft, 27). Thus we can see how these two women adapted and expanded the radical philosophy of their male counterparts for elaborating their own feminist theories. As Katharine Rogers points out, however, "radical theory was eagerly applied to women's rights only by those who were already disposed to be feminist while others ignored this application, just as the implications of Enlightenment rationalism and sentimental respect for feeling could be ignored earlier in the century" (Rogers, 181). This disregard for or dismissal of the feminist application can be seen in the reviewer's remarks quoted above.

Both Hays and Wollstonecraft accepted the eighteenth century rationalist belief in the necessity of reason ruling passion, although both had difficulty putting this doctrine into practice in their own lives. This struggle is most explicitly detailed in Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney,

but can also be found in Wollstonecraft's passionate love letters to Gilbert Imlay. But again, this failure on their part was ultimately more liberating than the opposite would have been, particularly in terms of sexual autonomy. As Rogers asserts, "It is obvious that a value system in which women demonstrated their reason by suppressing their passions was very convenient to a patriarchal society" (Rogers, 216). They were also responding to their passions in a way they had been taught they should by their reading. As Gina Luria points out in her discussion of Hays's behaviour in her youthful romance with John Eccles, Hays "was merely behaving as everything she read said she must" (Luria, 39).

That Hays was aware of her acceptance of the sensibility found in novels she had read and the danger of it is evident in her treatment of Emma Courtney's similarly passionate nature. Her self-criticism was mixed, however, with a revelling in that passion and a belief in the power and significance of it. As she writes to Godwin in a letter responding to his critique of the manuscript of Emma Courtney,

> Remember the different circumstances by which our characters have been form'd — recollect the strong enchantments which have bound my mind in adamantine spells — & then triumph, for you have cause, in the powerful diversion you have effected. How often have you poured the light of reason upon my benighted spirits! What struggles have you caused in a heart abandoned to its passions! ... I am already more tranquil, more rational, than I had hoped or expected to be in so short an interval, & for much of this tranquility I feel myself indebted to you — Be then not discouraged — be not disgusted to find I have yet advanced no further — my malady was too inveterate to be easily or quickly cured — it was a proof of strength, but strength ill directed (Luria, 1977, 528-29).

Hays is at once ashamed and proud of her irrational passion. She later in the same letter refers to Rousseau to justify her emotions (Luria, 1977, 529). This same pattern shapes the exchanges between Emma Courtney and the rationalist Mr. Francis in the novel.

Hays's background was reflected in the forms and topics of her output. Her earliest surviving letters are those written to Eccles in 1779-80. As Luria notes, she arranged these letters with Eccles's replies "as an epistolary 'novel' modelled after Richardson, replete with transitional notes and explanatory remarks" (Luria, 1972, 34). Unfortunately when these letters were published in 1925, this format was not maintained. The letters themselves are the typical product of two young people raised on sentimental novels, but even in these simple letters, Hays expresses a desire for an intellectual as well as a romantic attachment. She writes to Eccles, "A marriage where not only esteem, but love is kept awake, is, I am convinced, the most perfect state of sublunary happiness" (Wedd, 94). She continues saying that it is men's duty to ensure this enduring esteem and love. "Present, too, are the recurrent, primal desires of feminism: a separate self, an equivalent education, life-alternatives conducive to creativity" (Luria, 1972, 49).

Hays's first public work was the religious pamphlet "Cursory Remarks" which she published in 1792 under the name Eusebia. The pamphlet defends Dissenting religion's practice of public worship against Gilbert Wakefield's attack. She largely bases her argument on the Dissenting belief in the importance of the social aspect and duties of

religion. Inspired by the reception of this pamphlet, she then issued a collection of Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous in 1793, which was made up of discussions "written for women on the subjects of feminism, Unitarianism, materialism, and republicanism" (Luria, 1977, 526) in both essay form and in short didactic tales.

Her most controversial work of fiction was the result of Godwin's encouragement to fictionalize the frustrations of her unreciprocated feelings for William Frend and her ideas on the relations between the sexes, much as he had fictionalized his philosophy in Caleb Williams (1794). Hays's novel, Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), challenged the traditional roles of men and women in courtship and marriage. Much has consequently been made of the autobiographical content of this novel, and in light of the lack of biographical material available about Hays, several literary historians have regarded and used the novel as a factual account of her life. In the chapter devoted to her fiction writing, I will be looking at Hays's artistic use of autobiography in the novel, as well as considering the political significance of its presentation of sensibility and its epistolary form. She followed this novel with another in 1799, The Victim of Prejudice. In this work, Hays makes her political message even more explicit. She places the blame for the misfortunes of her heroine Mary on the hypocritical "morality" of society. Mary's consistency in behaviour and principles unjustly results in her victimization.

Hays also presented her feminist views in the 1797 Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of the Women, in which she saw herself

continuing the challenge Mary Wollstonecraft had begun with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). Hays's polemical work was published anonymously by Joseph Johnson, who at the time had been recently prosecuted for printing treasonous material. I will be dealing with the Appeal and the earlier Letters and Essays in detail in a later chapter.

After the turn of the century, Hays turned to a less controversial project in the compilation of her Female Biography (1803). As Luria points out, "The literary historians of the nineteenth century were apparently more interested in the 'respectable' works of the Jacobins than in radical polemics, for at least in Hays's case, it was Female Biography which proved to be her distinguishing achievement" (Luria, 1972, 15-16). Hays's feminism was still evident, however, in this choice of direction because of the ignorance or dismissal of much of women's achievements in history. Except for several works for juveniles, the only other work published in the period between 1803 and her death in 1843 was Memoirs of Queens Illustrated and Illustrious (1821) which it seems she produced at the instigation of a publisher who thought it would be a commercial success. For my purpose, the two biographical dictionaries will be treated with her political writing.

Taking into consideration her literary production and her ability to synthesize the many, often conflicting, ideas of her age into a feminism with its own emphasis on sensibility and moral reform, it becomes clear that Mary Hays deserves a place in literary history based on her

achievements and as more than simply a disciple and friend of Wollstonecraft and Godwin.

CHANGING IDEAS INTO FICTION

In 1795, Mary Hays's friendship with William Godwin had developed to the extent that she "wrote lengthy letters to Godwin, expressing her innermost feelings, questioning various aspects of his philosophy, revealing her unrequited love for William Frend". Godwin suggested that she "put her ideas about woman's plight, marriage, and a variety of other concerns, into fictional form" (Luria, 1972, 9-10), much as he had put his ideas into his novel Caleb Williams. He then acted as a critic and unofficial editor of Hays's developing novel, which became Memoirs of Emma Courtney. In her novel, Hays used many of the letters she had written to Godwin on these topics, having Emma Courtney write of the same subjects to her philosopher-friend Mr. Francis. She also used letters written to William Frend, expressing her feelings for him, as prototypes for Emma's letters to Augustus Harley in the novel. The letters to the two men are interspersed with a first-person narrative recounting the events of Emma's life and relationship with Harley, ostensibly as a warning to Augustus Harley, Jr. Hays again uses letters between characters in the structure of her later novel, The Victim of Prejudice, but they are outweighed by the confessional tone of the first-person narrative in the work.

Emma Courtney is framed by letters to the younger Harley in which Emma justifies her narrative as a warning to him. She writes:

> Rash young man! — why do you tear from my heart the affecting narrative, which I had hoped no cruel necessity would ever have forced me to review? — Why do you oblige me to recall the bitterness of my past life, and to renew images, the remembrance of which, even at this distant period, harrows up my soul with inconceivable misery? — But your happiness is at stake, and every self consideration vanishes (3).

Despite her professed pain in doing so, Emma goes on to relate her story in great detail. The constructed purpose of instruction to Harley is only recalled at the beginning of the second volume and at the end of the novel. Therefore it is relatively easy for the reader to forget this structure and feel as though he or she is being addressed directly. The use of the first person narrative throughout also strengthens this impression.

In the preface to this novel, Hays explains that she is writing Emma Courtney as "a *warning*, rather than as an example" (xviii, her emphasis). She, however, only makes this qualification to her stated aim in case her readers are "inclined to judge with severity the extravagance and eccentricity of her [Emma's] conduct." Hays urges her readers "to look into their own hearts; and should they find no record, traced by an accusing spirit, to soften the asperity of their censures", then they are to realize that the tale is a "warning". Her use of the first person and the resulting relationship that is established with the readers makes it harder for her audience to ignore the authenticity of Emma's feelings. Hays obviously felt that if her readers were as honest and as candid as both she and her heroine try to be about their own emotions, that they would find evidence of the same kind of "sensibility" to which Emma succumbs. She writes further: "Whether the incidents or the characters, are copied from life, is of little importance — The only question is, if the

circumstances, and situations, are altogether improbable?" (xviii). Hays here does not admit to the auto–biographical nature of her novel, as it is not her intention to offer a confessional account of her own life. Like other Jacobin novelists she is attempting to use her experiences to construct a political testimony or criticism of contemporary society or "things as they are". She draws her heroine with this in mind. Hays was not interested in portraying what J.M.S. Tompkins describes as "the circulating library heroine." Tompkins writes that in most novels written by women in the period 1770-1800, "Safety lay in one thing and one thing only, a strict adherence to established moral values" (149). Emma is aware of the restrictions placed upon her and spends much of the novel lamenting and rebelling against these established moral values.

An explicit example of Emma's strength of mind and opinion occurs early in the novel when Emma is accused (by the relative with whom she has been living) of indecorous behaviour in her friendship with Mr. Francis. She has sought Francis's friendship because of her loneliness and intellectual stagnation which she feels he can aid her in dispelling. She is told by her uncle, "You are but little acquainted Emma, with the customs of society; there is great indecorum in a young lady's making these distinctions" to which Emma replies, "What distinctions, my dear Sir! — in prefering a reasonable man to fools and coxcombs" (42). Her reply is characteristic of Emma's temper and disregard for custom, and prefigures the rebellious spirits of later heroines such as Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre or George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver. Emma is willing to explain and defend her actions, because as she says, "I have no

reserves, no secrets" (43), but it is the necessity for explanation and self-justification which Emma finds so frustrating and Hays insists that the reader too feel Emma's indignation. Emma's long speech in this episode reveals the reasons for her indignation, as well as introducing Hays's and Emma's view on the artificiality of chastity and the restraints which it places on women:

> Conscious of purity of intention, and superior to all disguise or evasion, I was not aware of these feminine, indelicate, unfriendly suggestions [the feminine refers to the lady of the house who has instigated this questioning]. If this behaviour be a specimen of what I am to expect in the world — the world may do its will — but I will never be its slave; while I have strength of mind to form principles, and courage to act upon them, I am determined to preserve my freedom, and trust to the general candour and good sense of mankind to appreciate me justly (44).

The value Emma places on candour is enormous. She conducts herself throughout the novel with "candour", a word which recurs frequently and is crucial to her challenge to the behaviour expected of a young "lady" in the eighteenth century. She chastises Harley, "Remember, all my earnestness, and all my simplicity, and *learn the value of sincerity!* " (129, her emphasis). She also questions the younger Harley in her opening letter, "Has a six months' absence obliterated from your remembrance the precept I so earnestly and incessantly laboured to inculcate — the value and importance of unequivocal sincerity?" (3). Emma's absolute belief in candour or sincerity is based on Hays's philosophical principle that "Free thinking, and free speaking are the virtue and the characteristics of rational being" (xvii). This belief is the source of Emma's troubles, but to Hays and to Godwin and the other

English Jacobins, the problem was society's inability to be sincere, candid, to allow free thinking, not their or their fictional characters' inability to dissemble. As Mr. Francis writes to Emma:

> If selfish and violent passions have been generated by the inequalities of society, we must labour to counteract them, by endeavouring to combat prejudice, to expand the mind, to give comprehensive views, to teach mankind their true interest, and to lead them to habits of goodness and greatness (50).

The belief that they could counteract the inequalities of society with their behaviour lies at the heart of the English Jacobin aim in writing fiction. They were attempting to show characters faced with these inequalities, and how lives were affected adversely by society's faults. In Emma's case, these faults prove tragic for her. As Hays has Emma say to Harley, "While the institutions of society war against nature and happiness, the mind of energy, struggling to emancipate itself, will entangle itself in error —" (160). Emma's principal error is her entanglement in her passions, one which as I have shown above, Hays felt was authentic and not uncommon. As she writes in the preface of her novel: "In delineating the character of Emma Courtney, I had not in view these fantastic models: I meant to represent her, as a human being, loving virtue while enslaved by passion, liable to the mistakes and weaknesses of our fragile nature" (xviii). Hays reiterates her opinions on character development and novel writing in the September 1797 issue of the Monthly Magazine, in which she writes, "The character of Clarissa, a beautiful superstructure upon a false and airy foundation, can never be regarded as a model for imitation. It is the portrait of an ideal being, placed in circumstances equally ideal, far removed from common life and

human feelings" (180). She continues in an appropriate vein for a novelist of the romantic-revolutionary school: "In fitting beings for human society, why should we seek to deceive them, by illusive representations of life? — Why should we not rather paint it as it really exists, mingled with imperfection, and discoloured by passion?" (180). She offers as an example Godwin's Ferdinando Falkland from his novel Caleb Williams. The didactic or revolutionary purpose of writing novels is made explicit; the form was useful to the English Jacobins because of its potential for exposing its readers to new ideas.

Using this potential for articulating new ideas, Hays has Emma consider her alternatives as a young middle-class woman just beginning a life alone. In doing so, Emma outlines not only the constraints she spends the rest of the novel trying to overcome, but also those with which Mary Hays and other eighteenth century middle-class women were faced. Emma contemplates dependence thus:

> Cruel prejudices! — I exclaimed — hapless woman! Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour? Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement? Why are we bound, by the habits of society, as with an adamantine chain? Why do we suffer ourselves to be confined within a magic circle, without daring, by a magnanimous effort, to dissolve the barbarous spell? (31)

Emma refuses to take complete personal responsibility for her unhappiness, and her refusal is an attempt to make readers aware of the "adamantine chains" and the "magic circle" within which, as women, they are confined by convention and custom. Hays has Emma again use the

magic circle as a metaphor for woman's limited sphere in a letter to Mr. Francis. Emma writes,

> I perceive, indignantly perceive, the magic circle, without knowing how to dissolve the powerful spell. While men pursue interest, honor, pleasure, as accords with their several dispositions, women, who have too much delicacy, sense, and spirit, to degrade themselves by the vilest of all interchanges [prostitution or possibly a mercenary marriage], remain insulated beings, and must be content tamely to look on, without taking any part in the great, though often absurd and tragical drama of life. Hence the eccentricities of conduct, with which women of superior minds have been accused — the struggles, the despairing though general struggles, of an ardent spirit, denied a scope for its exertions! The strong feelings, and strong energies, which properly directed, in a field sufficiently wide, might — ah! what might they not have aided? forced back, and pent up, ravage and destroy the mind which gave them birth! (86).

Within the "magic circle", women who follow the prescriptive rules of femininity, and are content to do so, are protected by the charm of their sphere.

Hays gives an example of one of these charmed women in her portrait of the younger Mrs. Melmoth. Mrs. Melmoth chastises Emma for her contradiction (and successful silencing) of a fashionable coxcomb at a dinner party, calling Emma "a shocking creature" (114) and "ill-natured" (116). Emma's attempt at enlightening Mrs. Melmoth is unsuccessful: "In vain I laboured to convince her, that to be treated like ideots (sic) was no real compliment, and that the men who condescend to flatter our foibles, despised the weak beings they helped to form" (116). This exchange allows Hays to dramatize Emma's challenge to convention, as well as her own.

Of course, the most obvious obstacles Emma encounters and challenges are the customs of marriage and courtship. This explicit challenge was responsible for most of the attention from the novel's contemporary conservative critics. As the reviewer in the British Critic writes of Hays: "The lady's head seems to be full of the sophistries of Rousseau, Helvetius, and writers of that class, which, with little scruple sacrifice morality at the shrine of passion" (1797, vol. 9, 314). By having Emma romantically pursue Augustus Harley, Hays explicitly challenged the rules governing a sphere which for many women was their only hope of exercising a limited power, making choices, and contributing to society. Emma is unusual and revolutionary in that she asserts her own worth: "I weep for him, as well as for myself. He will, one day, know my value, and feel my loss" (147).

This novel can be considered autobiographical if not in the narrative of events, then in the emotions of the heroine, which correspond to those of Hays. Hays was similar to Emma with the same tendency to indulge in feelings and to consider them a strength. A letter written to Hays in the mid-1790s by her sister Elizabeth, in which the latter defends herself from charges of lacking sensibility and reproaches her sister for over-indulging her feelings, could as easily be addressed to Emma (transcripts of Hays correspondence in Pforzheimer Library supplied by G. Kelly). This tendency of Hays seems to have been a common complaint or chastisement from her friends during this period, particularly from Godwin, and it plays an important role in her life as well as in her

heroine's. This correlation between the two is important in a consideration of Memoirs of Emma Courtney.

Hays's most original contribution to Jacobin thought is her attempt at synthesizing reason and passion, removing them from the dichotomous relationship imputed to them for so long and which even the Jacobins, and particularly Godwin, did not initially challenge. In this synthesis lies her strongest individual philosophy, but it is also the source of an ambiguity which permeates her novel. Hays was unabashedly open about her feelings while also being insecure about that openness. Although she can justify this emotionalism with her belief in candour, she constantly vacillates between affirming and suppressing her passion. She not only carries on this argument with herself (as Emma does in the novel), but also with Godwin.

Godwin's Political Justice, which sparked the friendship and correspondence between Hays and Godwin, is informed by Godwin's rationalism. Only in the years following did he soften and qualify his philosophy to include emotions and recognize the power and value of domesticity. As Gary Kelly writes of Godwin, "Both his contemporaries and posterity judged Godwin to be the most thoroughgoing rationalist of his time and it was a judgement he accepted willingly at first, but once he had completed Political Justice he began ... to see how much his rational philosophy was a creature of his heart's desire, a rationalization of his own emotional and intellectual experiences" (94). Hays's insistence on the value of sensibility or passion is also a product of her experience, as she reminds Godwin in the letter quoted earlier, where she writes,

"Remember the different circumstances by which our characters have been form'd" (Luria, 1977, 528). Hays sees her quickness of passion, like her heroine's, as "a proof of strength, but strength ill directed" (529), and she uses this perception in her writing. As Katharine Rogers points out, "It was natural for Mary Hays to adapt the sentimental novel to radical teaching, since she had seen herself as a heroine of sensibility before she became a feminist" (193) — or a philosopher.

The difference in the experience of Hays and Godwin and the outcome of that experience is grounded, of course, in gender. Hays tentatively reforms a sphere used to limit women into one that could empower them. Mary Poovey asserts that heroines of sentimental fiction were "[f]orbidden by convention to declare their desires" (43), a convention which despite his support of Jacobin feminism, Godwin upheld, and whose resistance Hays documents in her letters of Francis to Emma in the novel, modelled on those of Godwin to Hays. He repeatedly chastises her for straying from the path of reason and philosophy. Francis seems convinced that Emma needs guidance and she reinforces this with her insecurity, and in the first part of the novel, with her constant pleas for guidance. Nevertheless from the beginning, there is an implicit challenge to the rationalism espoused by Francis in Emma's reluctance to completely denounce her "irrational" sensibility. She does not ignore Francis's arguments "to join your efforts, to those of philosophers and sages, the benefactors of mankind" (50). Nor does she disagree that "It is the business of reason to compare, to separate to discriminate" (48) as Francis tells her in his first letter. She believes, however, that she is

exercising her reason throughout; for Emma her passions are tied to the cultivation of her mind just as Hays believed with Rousseau that "intense feeling is the touchstone of the emotionally elite" (Luria, 1972, 39). Emma Courtney says, "Philosophy, it is said, should regulate the feelings, but it has added fervour to mind. What are passions, but another name for powers?" (86). For Emma and for Hays, passion equals power. Hays applies to the realm of sexual or romantic passion the Rational Dissenter's tenet that religious faith would be strengthened and more profound if subjected to rational examination. When informed by reason, a worthwhile passion can be justified and thereby strengthened.

Mary Poovey in her discussion of Mary Wollstonecraft's writing deals with many of the same concepts, ascribing to Wollstonecraft "the ambitious project of converting the sentimental heroine into a self-made intellectual" (56). The parallels between Hays and Wollstonecraft are numerous, but despite a lingering ambiguity, Hays is more successful at dealing with her feelings about "sentiment". Poovey seems to feel that Wollstonecraft only gradually, after her experience with Gilbert Imlay, comes to an understanding of passion like that found in Hays's novel. "Wollstonecraft, does not want to abandon passion, for she feels too acutely the energy of her own subjective feelings; but she does not quite trust passion either. Thus she tried to vindicate feeling without capitulating to it" (64). The degree of distrust of "sensibility" differentiates the two authors. Wollstonecraft's distrust stems from her equating sensibility or passion with the exploitation of women, found particularly in

court culture. She later is able to adapt sensibility and passion to her own purposes. Perhaps because of less exposure to the danger of this exploitation, Hays is more likely and willing to risk capitulating to feeling, insisting on its strength by doing so. She does however make a distinction between the sensibility of well-placed, considered love and the overbearing passion of exploitative men, as can be seen in Mary Raymond's response to the advances of Sir Peter Osborne in The Victim of Prejudice.

Hays's defense of the worth of her heroine's sensibility is clear in Memoirs of Emma Courtney. After many letters covering the same material, Francis, when brought up to date on Emma's behaviour toward Harley, tells Emma once again that she has been the dupe of her passions. Emma responds with a certainty in her argument which earlier in the novel is overshadowed by her insecurity.

> I feel, that my arguments are incontrovertible: I suspect that, by affecting to deny their force, you will endeavour to deceive me or yourself — I have acquired the power of reasoning on this subject at a dear rate — at the expence of inconceivable suffering. Attempt not to deny me the miserable, expensive, victory. I am ready to say — (ungrateful that I am) — Why did you put me upon calling forth my strong reason? (149).

Emma sees rationalism as an outcome of her experience with sentiment, not as something that checked it. For Emma, and presumably for Hays, her passions and persistence in them are in themselves a victory that neither Francis nor Godwin can understand.

By this time, each correspondent knows the other's arguments before they are made, but it is as though they are speaking two different

languages, which do not share the necessary vocabulary to translate a concept from one to the other. Emma's arguments are anticipated by Francis in the preceding letter:

> I know you will tell me, and you will tell yourself, a great deal about constitution, early association, and the indissoluble chain of habits and sentiments. But I answer with small fear of being erroneous, 'It is a mistake to suppose, that the heart is not to be compelled. There is no topic, in fact, that may not be subjected to the laws of investigation and reasoning ...'(142).

Emma is equally familiar with Francis's line of argument. The passage quoted above where she writes, "I feel that my arguments are incontrovertible", is the only time Emma refutes Francis with such certainty; she is almost defiant. In fact, as Poovey asserts of women writers generally, "just as the inhibitions visible in her writing constitute a record of her historical oppression, so the work itself proclaims her momentary, possibly unconscious, but effective, defiance" (xv). For Hays, the defiance lies not only in the act of writing this novel, but also in her treatment of the relationship between passion and reason.

Not surprisingly, the exchange dealt with above is the last between Emma and Francis, for they ultimately cannot agree and they exhaust all avenues for possible compromise in their repeated discussions. We are given no more of Francis's letters or advice, and it can be argued that Emma has now learned to trust herself and her own peculiar philosophy and so no longer needs the authority of a Mr. Francis to instruct or guide her. Mr. Francis is dismissed from the novel altogether in a later chapter when Emma finds that he has gone to Europe. His departure is perhaps not as surprising to the reader as it is to Emma, for throughout the novel

Francis has served a singular purpose in terms of the novel's structure. His appearance interrupts the narrative, which has moved along very quickly with an autobiographical background of Emma's childhood and emotional development, and transforms the novel into its epistolary mode. In addition to the framing of the novel with letters to Augustus Harley, Jr., it is this middle section (volume I, chapter xv to volume 11, chapter xii) which gives the novel its partially epistolary nature. But just as Hays's use of the first person narrative forces the reader to respond, the epistolary form draws in the reader in another fashion. We are not only reading the narrative Hays has Emma choose to give us, but we are also reading or re-reading Emma's letters and those written to her. Janet Gurkin Altman comments on the complexity of this process in Epistolarity:

> For the external reader, reading an epistolary novel is very much like reading over the shoulder of another character whose own readings — misreadings — must enter our experience of the work. In fact, the epistolary novel's tendency to narrative reading, integrating the act of reading into the fiction at all levels (from a correspondent's proofreading of his own letters to publication and public reading of the entire letter collection), constitutes an internalizing action that blurs the very distinctions that we make between the internal and external readers (111-112).

It is exactly this blurring of misreadings that Hays wants the reader to share with Emma so that they sympathize with her 'sensibility' and understand the power inherent in it. She uses this techniques again in The Victim of Prejudice.

Because of the complexity involved in making explicit the emotions Emma feels — emotions which in 1796 had yet to be expressed with any

frequency or freedom in women's writing — the form of the novel peculiarly suits Hays's purpose. In terms of form, the novel crosses boundaries of genre and narrative voices, combining fiction, autobiography, first person narrative and epistolarity. If Hays had simply wanted to write an autobiography, or a revolutionary novel such as Godwin had done, she would not have chosen this mixture in which to do it. The form, then suggests her larger purpose. The ambiguity of her approach to sensibility as a possible source of power for women is also apparent in the structure of her novel. Hays writes that Memoirs of Emma Courtney is meant as a "warning, rather than as an example" yet the novel actually contains both.

The narrative of the novel, which is set up as a memoir, tells of Emma's life in an attempt to determine and explain why her character is such as it is. The first ten chapters are short accounts of important background material and formative events in Emma's life. She is asserting the belief, as many of the Jacobins did, that character is formed by impressions in youth. She tells the reader, "without outward impressions we should be nothing" (6). In her recounting, she frequently uses phrases like "I might call this my first affectionate sorrow" (11), and "This was the second strong impression which struck my opening mind" (16). This listing of formative impressions is not unlike Godwin's well-known listing of his first to fourth "oral instructors". Hays is having Emma write her autobiography, and the letters in this capacity become another device of revealing information about Emma, particularly her mental state. As Patricia Spacks writes in Imagining the Self, "All

autobiographers wrestle, specifically, with the truth of personal identity: trying, perhaps, to record that ineluctable sense of self to which some philosophers testify; trying, perhaps, to discover it or to manufacture it" (15). She uses both letters and narrative to manufacture a story with which the reader can sympathize, giving more than a linear retelling of events.

Acknowledging the autobiographical content of this novel and how it affects not only the events or plot but also the form and intention is crucial to understanding Hays's work. Writing of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, Poovey comments that "Through the use of thinly disguised autobiographical characters, these writers [and this applies also to Hays] explore, expand, and sometimes revise their own situations in such a way as to express or repress their own deeply felt desires" (45). In Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Hays uses material from her own life in her exploration of the restrictions placed on women by customs of behaviour and of courtship, but she also alters material in that she has Augustus Harley secretly married and therefore unable to return Emma's affections. By doing so, she does not have to deal with what presumably occurred in her relationship with William Frend — that he simply was not interested in her as she was in him. This revision also allows her to introduce the last part of the novel, which is little examined.

After the death of Mrs. Harley with whom she had been living, Emma returns to London and finds herself alone except for the friendship of Mr. Montague. She attempts to establish for herself some financial security (166) and the details given are unusually specific for what would be

considered a "sentimental" novel. When her attempt fails, she hesitantly agrees to Montague's marriage offer. Her candour once again moulds her response: "I have not a heart to bestow — I lavished mine upon one, who scorned and contemned it. Its sensibility is exhausted. Shall I reward a faithful and generous tenderness, like yours, with a cold, a worthless, and alienated mind?" (169). What changes her mind is not a sudden revelation that Montague, not Harley, is really the man for her (as might be expected), but that "after a long contest, my desolate situation, added to the persevering affection of this enthusiastic young man, prevailed over my objections" (169). Emma never, however, pretends to love Montague. If her tale is a warning, it is perhaps here that she would apply the strongest caution. Though her life to this point has been full of disappointment, it now becomes almost tragic. As we later learn, Harley's wife dies and he tells Emma on his deathbed "I have loved you"; only his marriage had kept him from acting on that love (180). We can assume that Emma was justified in her assessment of their relationship and that she has cheated herself in "giv[ing] her hand without her heart" (176).

Ultimately Montague shares Emma's knowledge that she has spent her passion on Harley and seeks revenge through adultery. Emma's response to his relationship with the governess Rachel is feminist in its concern for the girl: "Should you corrupt the innocence of this girl, she is emphatically *ruined*" (184). Though her concern for Rachel is somewhat paternalistic, it is sincere and Emma's discharging of Rachel is done as she says, "not on my own, but on *her* account" (185). She also "procured

for Rachel a reputable place, in a distant part of the county. — Before she quitted me, I seriously, and affectionately, remonstrated with her on the consequences of her behaviour" (185). The depth and sincerity of her compassion is shown again when Emma takes in Rachel and with Emma's daughter and Augustus's son, the four of them construct a family unit. Emma's construction of this unusual family is characteristically straightforward and forward-looking.

Thus, in the last section of this novel Hays touches on the politics of gender and class. Emma's financial position forces her into a disastrous marriage of convenience; her aid to her medical husband is fulfilling but unorthodox; the disparity in her and Montague's actions concerning Rachel are effectively narrated; and it is through her untraditional family that Emma finally gains some pleasure. To Hays, these issues are connected in Emma's world view. It is Emma's sensibility which gives her strength of emotion, complemented by her strength of mind and philosophical leanings. These characteristics in turn lead her to her political and Jacobin views on the faults of society. A reviewer in the Monthly Review states the problem she tackles as "whether it be prudent in minds of a superior mould, — whether it will bring to them a greater happiness in the whole account, — to exempt themselves from the common delicacies or hypocrisies of life, and on all occasions to give vent to their wildest feelings, with conscientious sincerity" (April 1797, vol. 22, 443). For women, Hays believed and shows in this novel, that these "wildest feelings" could be a source of intellectual strength, though a source not without its dangers particularly in terms of the "common

delicacies of life", and that this was an avenue that women should be able to pursue without censure.

In her second novel, The Victim of Prejudice, published in two volumes in 1799 (again by Joseph Johnson), Hays continues her political and feminist criticism of society. Terence Allan Hoagwood, in the introduction to a 1990 reprint of the novel, calls it "the most advanced and intellectually important fiction that she ever wrote" (3). The structure of the novel, in that it is not framed by letters distinct from the narrative, is much less complicated than that of Memoirs of Emma Courtney, and as such I believe strengthens her intent. She is also surer and more confident as a novelist. In the "Advertisement to the Reader" of Victim, Hays is insistent that the misunderstanding with which her first novel was met should not recur. Gone are the apologies and qualifications found in the preface of the first work. In fact, she openly insults those who did not understand the intention of Memoirs of Emma Courtney. Hays informs her readers, "Lest dullness or malignity should again wrest my purpose, it may be necessary to premise, that, in delineating, in the following pages, the mischiefs which have ensued from the too-great stress laid on the *reputation* for chastity in *woman* , no disrespect is intended to this most important branch of temperance, the cement, the support, and the bond, of social virtue: it is the *means* only, which are used to ensure it, that I presume to call in question." Although Hays is concerned that she will be accused of attacking chastity itself, it is her attack on the *means* of ensuring chastity which provokes her critics. I will return to this criticism later in the chapter. First, because this novel was until recently largely

unavailable, a relating of the plot of the novel is necessary to an understanding of Hays's purpose and approach.

The Victim of Prejudice is introduced as the autobiographical account of a "child of misfortune, a wretched outcast from my fellow-beings, driven with ignominy from social intercourse, cut off from human sympathy, immured in the gloomy walls of a prison" (vol. I, i). As such, the novel is written in the first person and is arranged as a chronological retrospective of the heroine's life, leading to her confinement in prison. As in Memoirs of Emma Courtney and true to Hays's belief in Helvetian principles, the reader is given the childhood and educational background of the heroine, Mary Raymond. Mary has been taken in at an early age by Mr. Raymond, a "sensible and benevolent man" (I, 5) who ensured that she had a well-rounded and thorough education. She has been physically active and so "was early inured to habits of hardiness; to suffer, without shrinking, the changes and inclemencies of the seasons; to endure fatigue and occasional labour; to exercise my ingenuity and exert my faculties, arrange my thoughts and discipline my imagination" (I, 6). Here was a heroine that Hays and Wollstonecraft would admire: physically, emotionally and intellectually strong. This girl, presumably, would be the norm, if the educational reforms advocated by the English Jacobins were carried out.

When Mary is eleven, Mr. Raymond decides to supplement his income by tutoring two "heirs to a gentleman of an ancient family and ample fortune" (I, 10). The gentleman, Mr. Pelham, is anxious that his sons not form any improper connections and so is reticent "to expose

their morals to the contagion of a great school" (I, 10). (I will refer throughout to this character as Mr. Pelham to distinguish him from his son William.) Mr. Pelham eventually comes to symbolize all the faults of society — its prejudices, narrowmindedness and maliciousness. This prejudice is hinted at from the first appearance of Mr. Pelham in his tone: "The family honour, he informed my patron, had been preserved uncontaminated for many generations, and it was his pride that it should descend unsullied to posterity" (I, 13). This uncontaminated "honour" concerns Mr. Pelham more than the character, honesty or true morality (as opposed to societal morality) of his sons. Mary and the eldest son, William, "from a mutual display of congenial qualities" (I, 13), quickly form a friendship which as they grow into young adults deepens into love. This period is described in anecdotes which illustrate the natures of William and Mary and their feelings for each other. At one point William manipulates Mary to steal grapes from the neighbour's garden by accusing her of not loving him enough to give him what he wants: "Your friendship for me is weak, since you will hazard nothing to oblige me" (I, 24). William's manipulation shows that he, though the object of the admirable Mary's affections, perhaps is not entirely worthy of them. After much deliberation between proving her love for William and obeying her guardian whom she also loves and whose rules and judgement she respects, Mary returns to steal the grapes. She is caught by the neighbour, Sir Peter Osborne, who seizes her and demands a kiss. "Shocked and affrighted by a brutality of manner so novel and unexpected" (I, 29), Mary manages to escape Osborne's hold.

Osborne, as a character, represents many of the faults of the upper classes, who having nothing valuable to do with their time, fall into drinking, sporting, and seducing and corrupting women. This first encounter with Osborne begins the second of two parallel plot lines that continue throughout the novel. Osborne continues to persecute Mary and her friends until he manages to take her honour later in the novel. I will return to this plot.

As William and Mary reach adulthood, Mr. Raymond can see their feelings for each other, and knows that William's father will never assent to their marriage. Because of this he suggests that Mary stay with friends, hoping the separation will cool their passions. He remains true to his character as a rational and benevolent man in that he does not order Mary to go, but explains that it is society (explicit in the form of Mr. Pelham) that will not accept the match because of their disparate backgrounds. Mary is frustrated by customs that would deny a love that she feels is rational and sincere. Here again, are echoes of Emma's belief in candour. It is society's customs that are wrong, not their love for each other. It frustrates Mr. Raymond to have to be the messenger of a morality which he does not support in principle. He cautions Mary that when William becomes a "man of the world", he will soon forget her. Though she has been well-educated and is in character superior to William, she will not be considered an equal for him. She realizes the contradiction inherent in Raymond's caution: "Unhappy parent! unhappy tutor! forced into contradictions that distort and belie thy wisest precepts, that undermine and defeat thy most sagacious purposes! — While the

practice of the world opposes the principles of the sage, education is a fallacious effort, morals an empty theory, and sentiment a delusive dream" (I, 78). Hays here underscores that the reform of the individual can be achieved through education, but is then frustrated by the lack of a corresponding reform in society's mores, a comment on the state of society at the end of the "revolutionary" decade in which she was writing. Until this societal reform takes place, the individual's potential can not be fulfilled. As Hays showed in Emma Courtney that Emma's problems were not to be blamed on her sincerity or candour but on society's lack of it, Mary is thwarted not by her own faults or miseducation, but those of society. Both these arguments are adaptations of Godwin's theory that the true morality of humankind could not be achieved within the corrupted or unequal institutions of society as they are. The Victim of Prejudice fits the recipe of a Jacobin novel in criticizing society as it is, as did Memoirs of Emma Courtney. In this novel, however, Hays is not taking on the institutions of courtship and marriage, but of chastity and virtue and the extent to which women are punished for their suspected (or real) sins.

When William searches out Mary and professes his love for her, Mr. Raymond is forced to reveal the extent of Mary's "unsuitedness" for Mr. Pelham's son. He discloses a letter written by Mary's mother, until this point unknown by Mary, before she was executed for her part in a tavern murder. In their youth, Mr. Raymond had proposed to and been refused by Mary's mother. He came upon her by chance many years later when passing the tavern where the fatal fight occurs. He subsequently learns

that when she refused him, she was in love with and so seduced by a man of fashion, who kept her as his mistress. She blames in part her upbringing for her misguided choice:

> Educated in the lap of indolence, enervated by pernicious indulgence, fostered in artificial refinements, misled by specious, but false, expectations, softened into imbecility, pampered in luxury, and dazzled by a frivolous ambition, at the age of eighteen, I rejected the manly address and honest ardour of the man whose reason would have enlightened, whose affection would have supported me (I, 152).

Instead, her seducer grew tired of her, and abandoned her and her unborn child. She became, for lack of any other option, mistress for a time to a friend of her first seducer. When he in turn betrayed her, she slipped into crime and alcoholism. As she explains in her letter to Raymond, "I perceived myself the victim of the injustice, of the prejudice, of society, which, by opposing to my return to virtue, almost insuperable barriers, had plunged me into irremediable ruin. I grew sullen, desperate, hardened. I felt a malignant joy in retaliating upon mankind a part of the evils which I sustained" (I, 162). It is at this point in her life that Raymond found her. In her last letter, Mary's mother asked Mr. Raymond to raise her infant daughter.

Mr. Raymond encloses this letter written by Mary's mother with his letter to Mary explaining his reasons for revealing her background at this point. With the use of letters, Hays draws in her reader as she did in the middle section of Emma Courtney, which was made up of the letters between Francis and Emma. It is particularly striking to have Mary's mother tell her own story. The reader is reading the letter at the same

time that Mary first sees it. Her reaction is not given until the reading of this letter, and Raymond's covering letter, is complete. As I have pointed out, this "reading over the shoulder" of a character that, as Janet Gurkin Altman asserts, "blurs the very distinctions that we make between the internal and external readers" (111-112), is used by Hays to make the experience of her heroine more engaging. The reader directly shares in Mary's first knowledge of her "disreputable" background and can formulate her own response, before finding that for Mary, "this first lesson of injustice swelled [her] heart with indignant agony" (I, 173).

The reader also shares in the interpretation of the import of Mary's mother's letter in Raymond's accompanying letter. He tells Mary, "In the eye of the world, the misfortunes of your birth stain your unsullied youth: it is in the dignity of your own mind that you must seek resource. The father of your lover has deeply imbibed these barbarous prejudices: the character of the son is yet wavering; his virtue untried, his principles unformed" (I, 171). Raymond is not confident that William's character is strong enough to withstand the censures of his father and of society at large if Mary becomes his wife. Mary's character is not at issue; he is confident of her dignity of mind, because he has ensured that she not fall into the errors of her mother by being uneducated, pampered or dazzled. When William reads the letter, he is undaunted. He suggests that they are the only people who have to know about Mary's background, but Mary will not lie nor ask her guardian to lie. In the end, despite William's protestations of undying and unconditional love, and his manipulative accusations (foreshadowed by the earlier incident with the grapes) that

Mary does not love him, she is firm. She concludes their long debate on the subject: "I dare to give you up, to lose, to renounce you. I can weep, and my sorrow shall be luxury; but I dare not, will not, consent to involve in my destiny the man I love, — to become at once his misfortune and his curse" (I, 195). William finally convinces Mary to agree that if he tells his father about her background and his love for her, and manages to get even a reluctant consent, they will marry. As Mary predicts, Mr. Pelham refuses, but Raymond gives her hope that "should his [William's] attachment prove worthy its object, these obstacles, though threatening, are far from insuperable" (I, 199). With this in mind, William sets off on a tour of Europe with Mary's assurance that if his feelings do not change in the two years he is gone, and if he has developed "some plan of independence", she would "glory in aiding him to give an example to the world of the triumph of virtuous and unsophisticated feelings" (208).

To Hays, it is virtuous for William and Mary to act on their feelings, not to submit to society's false morality which damns the daughter for her mother's mistakes. Of course, in turn, the mother's mistakes also stem from her miseducation which she did not choose. Accordingly, when it came to the only choice she did have, Mary's mother chose unwisely and that was her downfall. Determined not to repeat these mistakes and because of her different upbringing unlikely not to, Mary makes the right choices. She is a woman, however, in a society that rewards only what it perceives as virtuous, not necessarily what truly is virtuous.

William, it turns out, is not as strong or as clear in his convictions as Mary. His letters become fewer, shorter, and "less animated — less

tender" (vol. II, 31). Despite what appears to be William's betrayal, Mary refuses the proposals of others. Hays will not have her make the mistake Emma Courtney made, in part because her intentions with this novel are different. Mary tells Raymond, "I cannot, I ought not, to bestow on any man a reluctant hand with an alienated heart" (II, 35). At this point, her choices, because of her education and character, are not as limited as those of Emma when she lamented, "Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour? Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement?" (31). In contrast, Mary tells Raymond, "It is not necessary that I should marry; I can exert my talents for my support, or procure a sustenance by the labour of my hands" (II, 35). Mary is much better equipped to fend for herself. The blame for her misfortune can be placed only on society as represented variously by the characters of William Pelham, Mr. Pelham and Sir Peter Osborne.

After William's departure, Osborne continues his ongoing pursuit of Mary. He eventually addresses a proposition to Raymond, which Mary refuses because of Osborne's character and his vengeful treatment of her friends who protected her from his advances. After Raymond dies, Mary refuses Osborne once again, when he accosts her in the front hall of Raymond's house. She sends him off: "Nothing can atone for your behaviour: your late barbarous, unmanly conduct towards my friends has added, to my dislike of your manners and principles, aversion and horror. I will not listen to you; it is with impatience I bear you in my sight: I wanted not this new instance of your callous and inconsiderate nature" (II, 55).

Osborne in turn takes great pleasure in informing her the next day by letter that Mr. Pelham has spoken freely in London of her background and of his son's "fortunate" escape from her, and that William Pelham had returned from the continent and was engaged to "a rich heiress of a noble family", a marriage arranged by his father (II, 57). Osborne makes offers to Mary again, and vaguely threatens her if she again refuses. Mary defiantly tears up the letter and sends it back. When she goes to London to take a position as a governess in a good family, that Raymond had arranged for her before his death, Osborne contrives to bring her to his London residence. He keeps her there until one night at the end of a party during which he has been drinking, he rapes her.

When she refuses to become his mistress, demanding her freedom, he points out the absurdity of her request: "What will you do with the freedom for which you so vehemently contend? ... What is called, in your sex, honour and character, can, I fear, never be restored to you; nor will any asseverations or future watchfulness (to adopt the cant of policy and superstition) obliterate the stain" (II, 85). To Mary's threats to "appeal to the tribunal of my country ... [and] boldly claim the protection of his laws" (II, 81), Osborne replies brutally:

> Who will credit the tale you mean to tell? What testimony or witnesses can you produce that will not make against you? Where are your resources to sustain the vexations and delay of a suit of law, which you wildly threaten? Who would support you against my wealth and influence? How would your delicacy shrink from the idea of becoming, in open court, the sport of ribaldry, the theme of obscene jesters? (II, 85-6)

He paints an accurate picture of the reality of the "protection" her country's laws will provide Mary. Never does Osborne offer to tell the truth about what has happened, in which Mary is blameless. She has been vigilant of her chastity, but she is treated as the criminal.

Mary has now become the victim of the prejudice of which her mother wrote. In the rest of the novel, she encounters similar obstacles to a return to virtue. When she attempts to take the previously arranged governess position, she is turned away because of the rumours about her. She encounters William, who is in fact married, (only, we find out later, because he thought she was), and he helps her. Unfortunately his aid leads to assumptions that she is *his* mistress and her reputation is doubly soiled. She then supports herself for a time by her drawing and painting skills, until her employer makes sexual advances. Her refusal is met with surprise and the insulting comment that "Sir Peter Osborne and Mr. [William] Pelham found less difficulty, I have a notion, with my little charmer" (II, 139-140). Because of her rumoured immorality, Mary is treated like public property, open to the use of any man who pleases. She exhausts all her honourable avenues for sustenance, thwarted at every turn. She exclaims,

> I sought only the bare means of subsistence: amidst the luxuriant and the opulent, who surrounded me, I put in no claims either for happiness, for gratification, or even for the common comforts of life: yet, surely, *I had a right to exist!* — For what crime was I driven from society? I seemed to myself like an animal entangled in the toils of the hunter (II, 143, her emphasis).

The hunter in the form of Osborne appears periodically offering to rescue her from poverty and debtor's prison if she will consent to be his

mistress, but she is steadfast in her virtue, which to her is being true to her principles. She is eventually rescued from prison by an elderly former servant and lives with him in retirement on a farm. Her reputation, however, soon follows her there and her short happiness is again ruined. She ends in jail accused of stealing. No one, because of her reputation, believes her claims of innocence in the matter. It is here that she writes her narrative. In the "Conclusion", she explains how she is rescued from prison by her friends returning from overseas, and how she lives with them, but that her health, ravaged by her two years in prison is leading to her early death, which is how the book ends. There is no happy ending, no respite. Society does not relent.

This novel is obviously not autobiographical as was Emma Courtney, except perhaps in its treatment of the plight of single women at the time. Hays's political and feminist intentions are not paired with an exploration of or mining of her own personal affairs. She is, though not to the extent she was in her first novel, still concerned with the relationship between sensibility and intellect or reason. Mary, like Emma, is a young woman of strong emotions and considerable intellect, two characteristics not unrelated In Hays's view. Raymond praises Mary for her love of William, saying: "virtuous tenderness purifies the heart, carries forward the understanding, refines the passion, dignifies the feelings, and raises human nature to its sublimest standard of excellence, I rejoice in your capacity for these admirable sensibilities; but, when I perceive you exalted, but not enslaved by them, I exult and glory in my child!" (I, 198-99). By setting exaltation as the goal, and avoiding enslavement, Hays's

belief in the power of sensibility is no longer ambiguous. Because of this certainty, the relation between sensibility and reason is not as central an issue in The Victim of Prejudice. Mary's strength in both makes her an engaging and virtually faultless heroine, which emphasizes the tragedy of her mistreatment by society. In Emma Courtney, Emma's enslavement by her passions is at least partially responsible for her unhappiness. Because Hays does not want readers of Victim to miss her Jacobin criticism of things as they are, she ensures that the blame for Mary's unhappiness can only be placed on society's hyporcrisy and corruption.

Hays strengthens the tragic sense even further by having Mary write her own story. Mary is defiant that her story will be told and heard. She will *not* allow herself to be blamed; her confession becomes an indictment that her readers cannot lightly dismiss. She closes her account:

> *I have lived in vain!* unless the story of my sorrows should kindle in the heart of man, in behalf of my oppressed sex, the sacred claims of humanity and justice. From the fate of my wretched mother, (in which, alas! my own has been involved,) let him learn, that, while the slave of sensuality, inconsistent as assuming, he pours, by *his conduct*, contempt upon chastity, in vain will he impose on *woman* barbarous penalties, or seek to multiply restrictions; his sections and example, yet more powerful, will defeat his precepts, of which *hypocrisy*, not virtue, is the genuine fruit. Ignorance and despotism, combating frailty with cruelty, may go on to propose *partial* reform in one invariable, melancholy round; reason derides the weak effort; while the fabric of superstition and crime, extending its broad base, mocks the toil of the visionary projector (II, 231-232, her emphasis)

It is not partial, but thorough, reform that Hays wants. The targets of her revolutionary fiction reflect this desire. She tells the story of an

engaging individual victimized by society's faults in an attempt to point out those faults, so they can be reformed. The form of the novel points to Hays's intention. Made up of a passionate confessionary first-person narrative and of letters which the reader shares with Mary in reading, the novel's structure forces the reader to become engaged in the story. This engagement decreases the risk of the reader dismissing the strength and message of the narrative, and increases the likelihood of the reader then taking the next step to sharing in Hays's political purpose. Informing the reader is a first step toward accomplishing thorough reform.

Hays writes in her "Advertisement to the Reader", "it is the *means* only, which are used to ensure [chastity], that I presume to call in question". It is exactly this questioning that conservative critics attacked. Her heroine was not subjected to the censure as Emma Courtney was. In fact, the reviewer in the Monthly Review describes Mary as, "to the credit of the author's pencil, a spirited and affecting sketch" and as "amiable, noble, and virtuous" (vol. 31, 1800, 82). Neither did the reviewers question Hays's talents. The Critical Review called them "much above mediocrity" - not glowing praise, perhaps, but better than what was usually allotted Hays by these periodicals. This same review continues, "It is not the ability or the intention of Miss Hays that we dispute: it is the accuracy of her judgment". This reviewer feels that the novel "also exhibits that splenetic irritability which, by distorting decorum into prejudice, and custom into tyranny, tends to excite and to nourish the contagious and consuming fever of perverted sensibility" (vol. 26, Aug. 1799, 450). Both reviewers are quick to label Mary Raymond as a victim

of circumstance. "We must love and pity such a character as Mary Raymond: but her misery results rather from a general sentiment of detestation of atrocious crimes, than from any act which is entitled to the appellation of tyranny" (Monthly Review, vol. 31, 82). This reviewer in particular shares in exactly the hypocritical and false morality Hays was criticizing. He agrees with Mr. Pelham that his son should not be allowed to marry a woman whose mother has such a history; he reinforces that "we suffer from the vices of our parents" (82). A modern reader is likely to regard the rape of Mary as the atrocious crime, but in this review, Mary's mother, if not Mary herself, is presented as the criminal. Hays was justified in being concerned, "Lest dullness or malignity should again wrest my purpose".

Once again, Hays's criticism of and challenge to society as it was, was rejected because of its radical nature. Nevertheless, I would agree with Terence Allan Hoagwood in his assessment that the "novel engages itself with social issues so explicitly, profoundly, and totally, and in such a finished novelistic form, that the quality, depth and range of Hays's thought is apparent" throughout (Introduction to The Victim of Prejudice, 10).

FEMINIST AND BIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

Mary Hays not only wrote fiction with a political and feminist agenda, she also published political writing in the forms of a collection of letters and essays (1793), articles in periodicals such as the Monthly Magazine and the Analytical Review, and in a book length political tract, An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of the Women . The latter was published anonymously by Joseph Johnson in 1797. Her forays into writing biographical dictionaries also are founded in her feminist and political ideas.

While the feminism of Hays's novels lay in her claim for the potential power of sensibility or emotion and in her demand for reform in the attitudes towards courtship and chastity, the feminism of much of her more explicitly political work lay mainly in claiming women's intellectual equality with men, recognizing their achievements, and arguing for improvements in their education. She also continues to point out society's (men's) unjust treatment of women.

Generally, the English feminism of Hays's time and of much of the century preceding the 1790s was concerned with proving women's intellectual qualities and with asserting women's right to education. For radicals, this discussion was directly tied into the revolutionary changes being made in other parts of the world. The American and French

revolutions made possible the consideration and discussion of many radical societal and political ideas. For the Godwin-Wollstonecraft circle, as a group and as individuals, the challenge to established order, and criticism of the privileged classes and their customs and manners, was a constant in their philosophies. In the introduction to her catalogue of contributers to the periodical, The Anti-Jacobin, Emily Lorraine de Montluzin writes that the perceived threat of the Jacobin ideas lay in their being "deviant from political, moral, social, and religious norms ..." (10). They elaborated these ideas in the periodicals of the time and in political tracts, suggesting new ways of looking at and organizing society. Their output was most prolific during the 1790s and the publisher Joseph Johnson was one of the key players in this proliferation. Gerald P. Tyson in Joseph Johnson: A Liberal Publisher sums up his role: "In general, one can say of Johnson's output between 1788 and 1795 that it consistently attacked political and social conservatism, frequently suggesting radical alternatives that gained popular support and, as many people saw it, threatened the overthrow of the government" (93).

The men in this intellectual group, focussed their attack on political conservatism, concentrating to a large degree on elaborating the philosophy of the natural individual rights of man that played so large a role in the French and American revolutions. For the women, it was obvious that this attack was still missing an essential component. If a challenge to society and to conservatism was to be mounted, the treatment and place of women in that conservative society must also be challenged. The rights of woman, as well as of man, must be demanded,

and the new revolutionary discussions encouraged women like Wollstonecraft and Hays to make those demands. This connection was responsible for the shift in how women's position was discussed: "the new ability to see questions about women as questions about a society undergoing change, rather than questions about individuals, gave the arguments a different weight" (Browne, 176). When Wollstonecraft wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, she was writing from this philosophical environment and so is useful as a representative of the radical feminist ideas of the time. To anti-Jacobins, "Mary Wollstonecraft, with her feminism and her unorthodox lifestyle, was the very epitome of 'Jacobin Morality', a threat to the virtue and domesticity of every English woman and, ultimately, to the moral fibre of England itself" (de Montluzin, 13).

Wollstonecraft argued against women's subjection to men and for equal education for women. She does not deny women's inferiority, but is certain this can be changed: "it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated" (37). Characteristically, her arguments also bring in questions of sexual morality, the type that conservatives found threatening:

> Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing. The sensualist, indeed has been the most dangerous of tyrants, and women have been duped by their lovers, as princes by their ministers whilst dreaming that they reigned over them (24).

Wollstonecraft's discussion of the place of women is liberally sprinkled with political metaphors and parallels to the revolutionary ideas and events of her time. She here is questioning obedience, power and the abuses of power. It is telling that she uses the example of princes and ministers to illustrate her point about unenlightened women and the tyrants who rule over them. For Wollstonecraft, much in society at large could be solved by allowing women to be educated.

The topic of discussion found in Vindication was not limited to radicals; political conservatives at this time also gave more weight to discussions of women's position and women's education, and their opinions did not always seem very different from those of the radicals. Both were concerned with women's moral and intellectual education and how this affected their roles as mothers. Alice Browne in The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind classifies the focus of both groups into three areas: women's education; legal and economic weakness of women's position, especially that of married women; and the double standard in sexual morality (1).

The similarities lie in that both groups were discussing women's position in a "unified, serious and secular way" (2) where before this discussion had often taken the form of satire, or had the aspect of a situation that was simply to be "borne", almost in the religious sense of that word. Both radicals and conservatives agreed that women's education should be provided and broadened, and both felt that education would make women better mothers and wives. This area is one in which their arguments sound most similar. Wollstonecraft asserts

that, "To be a good mother — a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands" (152) and that, "Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational friendship, instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers — in a word, better citizens" (150). There is little in the above with which conservatives could find fault (after all, what could be less threatening than strengthening motherhood?) but it is the source of the arguments which they felt to be the threat, and the way it was expressed which was offensive. Conservatives were unlikely to speak of "snapping chains" and making "better citizens".

Conservatives often felt that women's education had gone far enough, while radicals were still pushing for reform. As Hays writes in her Appeal, opponents of women's education knew that women,

> by exercising their reason, and unfolding their talents, should point out to themselves, how they might exert them to the utmost. Such a developement of mind would undoubtedly enable them to see and reason upon what principles, all the other regulations of society were formed, — which however they may deviate in execution, are evidently founded on justice and humanity, — and would consequently enable them to bring home and apply those principles to the situation of their sex in general (97).

This application of the principles of justice would mean a loss of power to those who benefit from the injustice. There is also the implicit threat that if aspects of society were *not* founded on justice and humanity, they could be challenged. A belief in this prerogative of protest is a precursor to revolution.

Both radicals and conservatives seemed to agree that to a certain extent women were different from men and so should be treated differently. For the radicals, this meant different spheres but equal opportunities (as even they did not strongly challenge the maternal duty of women); for conservatives, this meant women had a largely moral role to play (a foreshadowing of the 'angel in the house' so prevalent in Victorian thought). "Radicals usually spoke in terms of freeing women, conservatives in terms of restoring them to their proper place" (Browne, 156). Conservatives believed this proper place was to be respected by men and it was only scoundrels, and other men who abused their power, who took advantage of women's weaknesses, and treated them as "play-things". Radicals, on the other hand, because of their revolutionary ideas, placed the blame on society, its institutions, and the acceptance of the decadent status quo. This difference also draws the most criticism from anti-feminists. The scathing review of Hays's Appeal in the Monthly Magazine censures the Appeal's author for abscribing "the miseries and distresses of life" to the "incorrect organization of society, and the abuses of established institutions" (April 1799, 310). The reviewer then dismisses the Appeal because of this inexcusable error of reason. The radicals' direct criticism of society and its institutions was not accepted by conservatives, even those like Hannah More who supported women's education.

As can be seen from the assessment in the above review, Mary Hays, in her feminist writing, had a "strong sense of women's oppression" (Browne, 169) and her analysis of this oppression fit solidly

into the category of radical. This analysis is done through her novels, as is evidenced in my treatment of Emma Courtney and Victim of Prejudice, and is found also in her non-fiction writing. Hays's sense of women's oppression was essential in drawing women together into a group which could then speak out against their oppression. It was also essential in challenging society's acceptance of the injustice directed towards women. Nothing could be changed until it was clear what needed to be changed. This acceptance included that of some of the male radicals of her group. She consequently spends much time in her writing refuting arguments given to justify women's subjugation by men. She could be, however, quite pessimistic about contemporary conditions of women and their ability to change the situation themselves (Browne, 169). It is no accident that her most explicitly feminist work is called an "Appeal" not a "Vindication". She describes herself in the Introduction to her Appeal as coming "[n]ot as a fury flinging the torch of discord and revenge amongst the daughters of Eve; but as a friend and companion bearing a little taper to lead them to the paths of truth, of virtue, and of liberty" (v-vi).

Although Hays does deal with sexual morality and misconduct, her most consistent and evidently strongest felt opinions deal with the subject of women's education. This opinion is introduced as early as in 1793 in her Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous, published through Joseph Johnson's press. The collection was made up of essays and letters covering various topics of philosophy, politics and feminism, and of moral tales and fragments, some of which she wrote "at an early period of life, as exercises of fancy" (ix). Several of the moral tales were

written by Hays's sister Eliza. Hays expresses her purpose in the "Preface" to the collection: "If seeing some common truths placed in an interesting point of view, any young minds should be incited to mental, or moral improvement, the end for which this little work was designed will be answered" (viii-ix). Many of the stories Hays tells in the letters in this book deal with the importance of education in the moral and intellectual development of girls and young women.

One of these tales, continued through several letters, is the history of a character named Melville. Melville was unfortunate in marrying a young woman, Serena, whom he felt he would be able to instruct. Because of Serena's early training by her mother "to the duty of non-resistance and passive obedience" (34), he is drawn to her pleasing and agreeable manner. Predictably, Melville's attempts at Serena's improvement fail: "Vain was every subsequent attempt to give fire to this breathing clay, early habits had rendered the mental organs callous" (39). Eventually Melville's money is spent through indulgences and extravagance. Leaving his wife and children with relatives, he goes to America to start over. Serena conveniently dies in England and Melville makes new acquaintances, including Cecilia, the niece of a country Unitarian preacher. Introducing Cecilia, Hays tells us, "Her uncle had paid particular attention to her education, and her improvement in every liberal science had amply awarded his cares" (54-55). Cecilia is described as "an invaluable treasure" (61) and as having "good sense" (65). She is drawn in sharp contrast to the mis-educated Serena and consequently her union with Melville is successful and happy for both of

them. The moral Hays is propounding is clear: happiness for both men and women can be found through the development of female education. Until these changes are made, bad marriages will be commonplace. Men will marry for charms and beauty and women will marry because they must.

Hays also presented her ideas in the periodicals of the time, most particularly in the Monthly Magazine. There, in March 1797, she expresses the opinion that "Women's financial dependence upon men, leads to marriage for 'mercenary and venal motives' (the worst kind of prostitution)" (Pollin, 278). By this time, Hays had shown the results of this kind of marriage, even when it is accompanied by respect, in Emma Courtney. Hays's solution is quite progressive: "She proposes a training for the 'trades and professions' which are suitable for women, to enable marriage to be less mercenary in motive, family support may then be shared by both partners" (Pollin, 278). The idea of having both husband and wife employed must have seemed shocking at the time; now it has become almost an expectation of marriage, although women's right to work is still at time challenged by conservatives.

Hays touches on other subjects in Letters and Essays and in her writing for periodicals. She deals with the philosophy of materialism and necessity in two letters in her collection, one addressed to a friend, "Amasia", following up on a recent conversation the two have had on this topic. After outlining her beliefs and arguments, Hays characteristically points out, "Few adhere so obstinately to their own tenets, as those who have taken them upon trust, without a proper examination, Let us have

the courage to trace our ideas, as far as we have the ability through their whole train of consequences; this can afford the only test of truth" (170). Hays's approach here is grounded in her upbringing as a Dissenter and their belief in rational examination, a belief which she applies equally to the areas of philosophy and of love. Again, anything worthwhile, for Hays, is strengthened by examination.

The tone of the second letter, "To Mr. ——— on Materialism and Necessity" is stronger. She is evidently replying to a letter and addresses each of his concerns or opinions in turn. Her style is clear and firm. At one point, she writes,

> You have purposely (you tell me) avoided consulting any author, as you account it plagiarism to adopt the opinions of others: pardon me, if I presume again to differ! How slow would be the attainment of the most ingenious and acute unassisted mind! Did we not avail ourselves of (though not servily copy) the wisdom and labour of past ages, arts and sciences would be ever in their infancy, and we should scarce ever rise above savage life. Every thing is progressive (174).

This is ground that Hays treads with certainty and which informs her philosophical views. To her, improvement, both individual and societal, is always to be strived for and can take many forms, including revolution. In an essay "On Civil Liberty", Hays muses, "It appears to me that all monarchical, and aristocratic governments, carry within themselves the seeds of their dissolution, for when they become corrupt, and oppressive to a certain degree, the effects must necessarily be murmurs, remonstrances, and revolt" (17). Revolution is not desired by Hays, but neither is it wholely dismissed as a means of effecting change. It was beliefs such as this one and her opinions on the position of women

introduced in this collection that led to Hays's classification by the periodicals and, in turn, by the general population, as a subversive or Jacobin. Although the reviewer in the British Critic writes that "[t]hese letters and essays contain some just and important observations, conveyed with much spirit", the larger part of the assessment is taken up with the criticism

> that they betray a strong tincture of the false and superficial philosophy of certain modern writers, with whose works she appears to be too well acquainted; a little of that pride and assumption, which has been lately excited by the advocates for the rights of women, and by the peremptory and presumptous decisions of those who are not contented with the civil and religious liberty which prevails in this country (August 1793, 463).

Hays was now accurately and irreversably classified as belonging to this group of discontented reformers.

The reviewer in The English Review , calling her writings "crude effusions," excuses the attention he has given Hays's collection:

> Yet we have been sedulous to bring forward into full view every female politician and philosopher that meet us in the paths of literature; since to render these characters conspicuous, is, generally speaking, to expose them to the contempt and ridicule which they deserve, by detecting their affectations, their vanities, and their follies. And thus the pupils of Mrs. Wollstonecraft actually invalidate, by these specimens of themselves, the very doctrines which they are labouring to establish. Proudly to vaunt their intellectual powers, and to exhibit, at the same instant, the most 'damning proofs' of mental imbecility, has (providentially, we had almost said) been the fate of these literary ladies (October 1793, 256).

About this reception of Letters and Essays, Gina Luria points out, "Hays's feminism is the most galling of all her presumptions to the critic in The English Review, especially because Hays presents feminism as a natural

consequence of enlightened thinking" (179), thinking which it is clear the reviewer sees as anything but enlightened.

Between the publication of Letters and Essays in 1793 and that of An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on behalf of the Women in 1798, Hays became more firmly a part of the English Jacobin circle. She also began to write novels and to express her opinions in the Monthly Magazine. In his examination of that periodical, Geoffrey mentions that, "Dr. Reid and Mary Hays discussed in its pages the more rational treatment of the insane" (161), evidence of Hays's interest in other areas she felt needed reform. Yet, the cause which understandably remained most important to Hays was that of feminism.

Hays describes her Appeal as having the "professed purpose of advancing and defending the pretensions of women, to a superior degree of consideration in society, to that which they at present enjoy" ("Advertisement to the Reader"). Although, as she explains, much of the work was written earlier in her life when she first began to consider these issues, Hays delayed publication of her work in part because of the appearance of Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, for which she expresses sympathy and admiration. Now, after Wollstonecraft's death, she has decided to publish, taking on the role, albeit in a less strident tone, that was Wollstonecraft's. Claire Tomalin says of Hays that she was concerned "to keep alive her [Wollstonecraft's] message". She further suggests that Appeal would not have appeared if Wollstonecraft had written volume two of Vindication (239).

Hays's work is an eloquent and detailed appeal for men to relinquish all the arguments they use to keep women subjugated and so deals in turn with each area of their rationalisations for doing so. She begins by refuting the idea that the Bible supports the subjection of women. She draws on her religious background, her knowledge of the Bible, and her belief in "a wise, a just, a beneficient Creator" (5). Her argument in part rests on the point that man has not been expected to be forever bound to his curse to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, therefore why should woman be forever bound to be subject to the power and authority of her husband? The world has progressed and ideas must progress as well:

> The circumstances in which our first parents were placed, were so extremely unlike whatever has, or can take place in common life, that to suppose subjection on the part of women to be from such a cause the constant and unalterable appointment of Heaven; is such a perversion of the spirit as well as of the letter of the law, as does not come short of absolute and decided absurdity (5).

She argues further that Jesus never spoke directly in favour of women's subjugation.

Hays then takes on arguments "adduced from reason". Hays believes that if men "look Reason boldly in the face" and without prejudice, they "must agree at last" (29) with her arguments, for true Reason is on her side. She then deals with the erroneous ideas of men about "the Characters and Abilities of Women". Hays does not make an apology for women's faults but writes, "If such are not the effects of bad habits raised upon wrong education, as I much suspect they chiefly are, — they are at best, but imperfections of our nature, which we should

endeavour to correct, rather than soften and indulge" (43-44). Women do not have any more faults than men, but where men are criticized for theirs and expected to take responsibility for their weaknesses and strive to correct them, women are encouraged in and praised for their weaknesses. An example of this condescending praise can be found in one of the reviews of Letters and Essays, in which the reviewer gives his belief that "diffidence in decision, particularly in important points, is a great ornament to the female character" (British Critic, 463).

The next section of Appeal , "What Men Would Have Women to Be", fittingly follows the above described section. Of men's expectations, she writes,

> What a chaos! What a mixture of strength and weakness, — of greatness and littleness, — of sense and folly, — of exquisite feeling and total insensibility, — have they jumbled together in their imaginations, — and then given to their pretty darling the name of woman! (47).

She asserts that because of this chaos it is not surprising that women's behaviour is correspondingly irregular. Hays in this section also deals with the idea of women as being more virtuous than men and the paradox inherent in raising inferior beings (as women are in their present state) as models for virtue. Although this elevation does give women some power, Hays feels women would gladly exchange it for true equality:

> But we relinquish willingly this kind of preference which you force upon us, and which we have no title to: and which indeed is an intolerable burthen in the way you contrive to administer it; and instead of this, we only entreat of you to be fair, to be candid, and to admit, that both sexes are upon a footing of equality, when they are permitted to exert in their different

> spheres of action, the talents their Creator has been pleased to bestow upon them (61-62).

Hays makes a claim for an equality which she could not know, but may have suspected, would be demanded by women for centuries, and unfulfilled for as long. Placing faith in a familiar and comfortable sphere of influence, no matter how limited, is much safer than placing faith in an illusive possibility of equality. Hays believes all women must share her desire for equality. Mixed with her belief in this desire is evidence to support the accusation Alice Browne makes of reformers of the time: "Their tone is often patronising toward women, implying that they are passive objects of reform, rather than responsible moral beings" (6).

Hays's desire for changes in women's position is genuine. At the same time she realizes all women may not feel the same way. She addresses this seeming lack of desire in her section "What Women Are", when she asks,

> can it be wondered, that they have lost even the idea of what they might have been, or what they still might be? For they are confined, not only within those bounds, which nature and reason unite in prescribing for the real happiness and good of mankind; and in which every virtuous and well informed mind acquiesces, as much from choice as necessity; but they are likewise bound by chains, of such enormous weight and complicated form, that the more they are considered, the less hope remains of being able to unloose them by perseverance, or break through them by force. Or if some impelled by an ardent love of liberty, by genius, or by despair, 'burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords away' —Alas! the consequences too often are — Ruin to the individual, with benefit to the whole (70-71).

Hays is keenly aware of the complexity of women's subjugation and the censure that greets those who try to act against it. She had been the

target of this censure herself and had also seen it directed at Wollstonecraft. The complexity of the situation dictates that men will have to also take up the cause for it to succeed, "and men will hardly of themselves, seek to improve a situation, with which many are apparently satisfied" (72). Here, Browne's comment about Hays's pessimism regarding the power of individuals to change themselves (Browne, 169) rings true: "any marks of spirit, or sense of injury, or desire to better their situation; is treated not only with contempt, but abhorrence" (Hays, 72). Until society undergoes a change, Hays believed, it is nearly impossible for individuals to change. This is exactly the paradox with which Mary Raymond is faced in The Victim of Prejudice.

The remainder of the section on "What Women Are" is taken up with describing how women's frustration leads to their talents and energy being turned to other areas, for the mind "must be occupied one way or other, well or ill" (80). Women will then turn to "[p]etty treacheries — mean subterfuge — whining and flattery — feigned submission — and all the dirty little attendants which compose the endless train of low cunning" (91). Hays asks, "And if indeed, women do avail themselves of the only weapons they are permitted to wield, can they be blamed?" (91). Gina Luria comments, "This is one of the shrewdest insights of the Appeal: there is little domestic harmony at present because women are not the inferiors of men but are, rather, equally — if differently — clever and manipulative" (Luria, 197). Hays insists that men must admit their role and complacency in this aspect of women's characters. She also stresses that her argument, however, is not with men personally but with

the system for the "absolute government of women" (95) that they have constructed and enforced.

Hays details a plan for rectifying the situation which would eventually "restore to woman that freedom, which the God of nature seems manifestly to have intended, for every living creature" (105). To effect this restoration, "the first step ought to be, the reformation of the moral conduct of the men themselves; and the next that of educating women on a more liberal and unprejudiced plan, and putting them on more respectable footing in society" (115-116). Hays, however, is not naive about the obstacles to her plan. She predicts that it is at this point in the plan that men will revert to flattering women, admiring their "feminine" qualities, and telling them "that in women's weakness consists her strength, and in her dependence her power" (116). The latter is of course an argument that could only be used by those *with* the power in the situation. Hays calls upon reason once again to show the men who argue in the above vein that they "have not a leg to stand upon" (117).

In the final section of the work, Hays describes in detail "What Women Ought to Be", if men were to reform themselves and if women were educated. This future state can be summed up in Hays's words. Women should be "considered as the companions and equals, not as the inferiors, — much less as they virtually are — as the slaves of men. In every station they are entitled to esteem, as well as love" and they should not be for men "their drudges in the common ranks, and the tools of their

passions and prejudices in the higher" (128). Hays's plan would touch women of all classes, not only those of the upper and middle classes.

Although Hays's focus in this work is the position of women, her larger political or humanitarian purpose is present as well. In the last pages of the work, she warns

> that even if the pretensions of the sexes were finally adjusted, and that equilibrium established, which I have endeavoured to point out as necessary to the peace and satisfaction of both; that perfection, or compleat happiness, is not to be expected. Of this however we are certain, that, if universal justice were to prevail among mankind, — in which of course we include womankind, — that we should then be on the high road to happiness (291).

Hays's desire for equality for women is part of her larger desire for universal justice. It is, of course, this belief in the equality of humans and the importance of justice that led the Jacobins to support the French revolution and its precepts, despite their apprehensions about the course of the revolution's actual events.

Not surprisingly, the Appeal met with a mixed reception. It was respected among radical circles and ridiculed by conservatives. The Analytical Review published both a summary and a review in its July 1798 edition. The reviewer for the periodical was receptive to Hays's arguments and his response was probably much like Hays would have hoped for. He treats her work as part of a movement which has "brought against us, as a sex, a heavy charge of usurpation and oppression, utterly inconsistent, as they pretend, with the liberal principles between man and man so eagerly contended for by the more enlightened part of society, and subversive of every notion of rational reform" (Tomalin,

Appendix II, 274). He is willing to consider that his sex is guilty of the charge brought against them and does not dismiss Hays's arguments as outrageous and irrational; he is able to do as Hays has suggested men do, look Reason in the face and consider the truth. His closing comment, after extensive extracts from the Appeal, is an apology for the unusual length of the review with the justification that they have done so "from regarding a subject involving the welfare and happiness of half the human species as of no inconsiderable importance" (290).

In contrast, the review from the April 1799 Monthly Magazine, which has been quoted elsewhere in this paper, offers nothing but criticism and derision for the arguments presented in Appeal. The reviewer's summary of the main points is highly sarcastic: "Man, therefore, is her tyrant and superior; odious subjection to his power is the cause of all her misery" (310). The review ends with the statement that the reviewer finds the work's "reasoning weak and frivolous" (310). If Hays had affixed her name to Appeal instead of publishing it anonymously, the reviewer would probably have been even harsher. In the same edition, there is a review of A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordinations, with Anecdotes by Anne Frances Randall. The comment is made that "Mrs. R. avows herself of the school of Wolstencraft (sic); and that is enough for all who have any regard to decency, order, or prudence, to avoid her company" (311). It was well known that Hays was also of the school of Wollstonecraft, but one can assume that this point (which would be clear in a reading of the Appeal), took second place in the reviewer's mind to what he/she saw as the

absurdity of her blaming the "incorrect organization of society" (310) for women's miseries. Hays lays the blame where it belongs and by directly addressing her work to men, she demands their attention be given to the issue. The reviewer in the British Critic, however, refutes her argument: "woman is unhappy only as man is frequently unhappy, not from her subjection or his usurpation, but from the common follies and weaknesses of each, and from the evils necessarily incident to our imperfect constitution of mind and body" (Feb. 1799, 206). The imperfection of man, for this reviewer, cannot be related to the imperfection of society. Unfortunately, despite the thoroughness and strength of her arguments, it was only those like the reviewer in the Analytical Review, already disposed to be sympathetic to Hays's arguments, who gave her arguments any credence or consideration.

Hays's comment that she would never have published Appeal if Wollstonecraft had written a second part to A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, shows that she obviously regards her work as, at least in part, filling that sequent role. This view is justifiable. Wollstonecraft wrote of women's position; why she believed women were as they were; explained how she felt education could change that position; and how things would improve once those changes in women's education and society's attitudes were made. She does so passionately and confidently. Her work, as she must have known and hoped it would, led to much discussion and criticism of her ideas. When Hays takes up the torch, she does so by refuting the arguments used by Wollstonecraft's opponents to dismiss her Vindication. Because of this difference in

audience and intent, Hays's work is more linear, as I have shown, touching in turn on each aspect of these conservative arguments. Although well-argued, and organized, Appeal is not as encompassing or as original as Wollstonecraft's work, but it serves well the purpose Hays intended it to serve, and effectively sustains the discussion of Wollstonecraft's ideas.

Despite her interest and desire in propagating these ideas, Hays, after writing The Victim of Prejudice, soon left behind this arena of explicitly political and feminist writing. In Appeal, she touches on what was to become her next project. In the section where she addresses the abilities of women, she makes reference to achievements of women in history. She includes a brief list, then protests,

> But, heaven defend me from drudging in the mines of history and antiquity, and dragging forth to adorn, and swell out my slender pages, all the precious jewels of ancient, middle, and modern times! Life is too short for such an undertaking. It is enough for my purpose that we know, that such things as we allude to, have been, 'and are, and are most true' (35).

Despite this protest, she had already begun "drudging in the mines" in 1798. A note in the Monthly Magazine indicates that Hays "is at present engaged upon a Biographical Work of great and lasting interest to the female world, to contain the lives of illustrious women of all ages and nations" (December 1798, 456). Her Female Biography was published in 1802. At this point in history, there were still relatively few collections of this sort. The publication of George Ballard's Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain in 1752 had begun a trend of compiling biographies of women, which was meant in part to supplement the

numerous works about men's achievements. Ballard comments in the preface to this work that despite the wealth of information about men, women's achievements "have been passed by in silence by our greatest biographers" (vi). He continues,

> When it is considered how much has been done of this subject by several learned foreigners, we may justly be surprized at this neglect among the writers of this nation, more especially, as it is pretty certain, that England hath produced more women famous for literary accomplishment than in any other nation in Europe (vi).

Ballard's collection was financed by subscription; 145 of the 600 subscribers he lists are women. In its pages, Ballard discusses 63 women, including Mary Astell and Anne Kingsmill, Countess of Winchelsea. The focus is literary achievement, but none of the women included relied exclusively on their literary careers for their livings. All were respectable and none were living at the time of work's publication — his choices were defensible. Memoirs of Several Ladies broke the ground in this area, and "[l]ater in the century, women began to appear in general biographical dictionaries such as the Catalogue of 500 Celebrated Authors of Great Britain, Now Living (1788)" (Rogers, 33) among others.

The growth in the numbers of biographies of women published since the middle of the eighteenth century was in part because of the increasing support for women's education and because of the related increase of women as consumers of books. "Eighteenth-century writers and publishers were conscious of the importance of women as an audience, and published a wide range of works dealing with women, and

directed primarily or exclusively at women" (Browne, 22). It is this consciousness which results in Hays having little trouble in finding a publisher and audience for her work. "[B]iographies, as publishers quickly learned, sold well" (Nadel, 67). Hays's publisher for the work was Richard Phillips, who earlier had founded and published the Monthly Magazine. Gina Luria points out that "[a]s an astute and successful business man, Phillips was naturally interested in cashing in on the 'business' of 'life-writing,' which, beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing until well into the nineteenth, proved a boon to publishers, booksellers, and writers of every capability" (1972, 411). The economic advantages for Hays in compiling such a work cannot be lightly dismissed. She was after all a single middle-class woman with limited resources; writing was her means of support. The popularity of biography at the time meant "high fees, good sales" (Nadel, 67). In fact, Gina Luria cites evidence in letters from Hays to Henry Crabb Robinson, that her fees from Female Biography, allowed her to live quite comfortably in a house outside of London (1972, 464).

Hays's choice of biography or "life-writing" is consistent with her larger purpose. As Ira Bruce Nadel points out in Biography, Fiction, Fact and Form, biography's moral purpose, particularly in the nineteenth century, was to instruct. "The condensed life with a moral purpose, contained within a volume or series of similarly styled lives whose brevity permitted only anecdotal illustrations of personality, resulted in a long and popular set of titles that shaped nineteenth century life writing" (19). The above aptly describes Hays's Female Biography, but Hays did not

allow herself to be limited strictly to "anecdotal illustrations" as can be seen from her sources below. To her instructional purpose, she added her feminist and political ideas. With biography, as with the sentimental novel, Hays chose a popular form to serve these purposes. Nadel asserts that, "[i]n an age of investigation and personality, biography attained popular and common prominence" (67).

The political and feminist purposes of writing Female Biography are clear in the opening page of the preface. Hays writes, "My pen has been taken up in the cause, and for the benefit, of my own sex" (iii). She makes repeated references in the preface to this purpose and to women as her intended audience. She admits that accordingly "little new is brought forward in this work" (vii), but insists that her intention does not require new or extensive scholarship.

In fact, the sources upon which Hays drew are varied and numerous, too numerous to list. They include previous biographical dictionaries, various individual memoirs, national histories, and anecdotal collections. The length of each entry varies but each includes: when the woman was born; why she is distinguished — be it for learning, beauty, charm, and/or courage; and who her admirers were, with frequent quotations of praise. Where possible and particularly in the case of literary achievers, Hays makes use of the words of the actual subjects, from their literary work or memoirs. Hays includes both fact and fiction in her entries but attempts to identify them as such for the reader.

As in the length of the entries, Hays's choice of subjects is also varied. Some generalisations, however, can be made. Again, as in

Ballard's collection, none of the writers are living. Her subjects include ladies of learning, (some of whom are quite obscure), European and African queens, saints, noblewomen, actresses, and poets. Much can be learned about Hays's personal philosophies from a closer look at her choice of subjects. The layers of complexity involved in these choices is endless. As James L. Clifford notes in his introduction to Biography As An Art:

> As we grow more and more aware that every choice of a passage to be quoted involves a personal decision which is motivated by all the psychological factors which have formed the biographer's own personality and opinions, the complexities involved in the whole process of writing a life becomes more apparent (xviii-xix).

Particularly in short entries such as those in Female Biography, Hays's choice of what information *is* given, and what tone the entry is given, can be as telling as her choice of subjects. There are two particular aspects of the collection which stand out and are characteristic of Hays's thinking and approach. The first is Hays's inclusion and praise of women distinguished for their learning, stemming, of course, from her belief in the value of education for women. The second is how Hays views women who were unusually or especially religious. Her tone in these latter entries stems largely from her Dissenting approach to religion and rational enquiry. I will also include a general consideration of Hays's tone throughout the work.

Hays places much weight on the influence and value of education or learning. Of Anne of Bretagne (1477-1514), Hays notes that her education was carefully supervised and because of this, she in turn

patronized learning. Her influence was considerable. Consequently, "Modesty and prudence, became by her example, the fashion of the court" (vol. I, 133). Hays's Jacobin criticism of court culture is implicit in her focus as is her belief that those in positions of power and influence are bound by their positions to act as intellectual and moral role models for their subjects. In the same vein, writing of Elizabeth, Queen of England, Hays applauds Elizabeth's intellectual capabilities. She attributes these to "the custom of the times to instruct young women in the learned languages; an admirable substitute for fashionable and frivolous acquisitions: habits of real study and application have a tendency to strengthen the faculties and discipline the imagination" (IV, 71).

Hays also takes this opportunity to level a blow at those anti-feminists who cite the lack of female excellence as support for women's natural inferiority. Hays asserts, "If the question respecting the equality of the sexes was to be determined by an appeal to the characters of sovereign princes, the comparison is, in proportion, manifestly in favour of women" (IV, 70-71). Women, history shows, make better rulers. She continues: "Elizabeth of England affords a glorious example in truth of this position" (IV, 71). Hays's biases and concerns remain constant and inform her biographies.

As well as the learning of women of court, Hays includes many other women who were distinguished by their achievements in learning and writing. One of the more interesting inclusions in this category is that of Catherine Macauley. Macauley was an earlier, but not much earlier,

advocate and forerunner of many of the same feminist criticisms and ideas propounded by Wollstonecraft and Hays. Her Letters in Education, published in 1790 dealt with much of the material Wollstonecraft treated in A Vindication. In the work, she advocates education for women, and criticises the existing position ofwomen. She was known to most, however, as a historian. The oddity of being such is commented upon by Hays: " A female historian, by its singularity, could not fail to excite attention: she seemed to have stepped out of the province of her sex; curiousity was sharpened, and malevolence provoked" (V, 292). It is no accident that Hays comments upon the censure that Macauley endured by the public because of her perceived immorality (in marrying a younger man). Hays describes the assault: "The author was attacked by petty , and personal scurrilities, to which it was believed her sex would render her vulnerable. Her talents and powers could not be denied; her beauty was therefore called in question, as if it was at all concerned with the subject; or that, to instruct our understandings, it was necessary at the same time to charm our senses" (V, 292). The energy of this description is evidence to Hays's resentment of the attacks both she and Wollstonecraft also endured as women achieving literary and intellectual success. To this personal tincture must be added Hays's general intention to show the injustice of treating women of achievement in such a manner when men of the same ilk did not have to fear this type of abuse.

Hays's Dissenting beliefs in religion and the need for rational enquiry also pervade her tone in treating many of her subjects,

particularly Catholics and those experiencing any kind of religious fervour. It would seem that in writing of Joan D'Arc, Hays would choose to focus on the singularity of that woman's character and fate, in that she was "[a]ccused of violating the decorums of her sex, by assuming the habits and the command over men" (I, 166). Hays's main focus, however, lies elsewhere. She writes of Joan D'Arc, "her imagination became inflamed, the delusions of which she mistook for an impulse from heaven" (I, 147). Hays continues on in this entry to discount rationally the 'miracles' associated with Joan's life.

Often these entries dealing with women of religious employment or power are presented as warnings. Writing of Margaret Beaufort's devout penchant for hairshirts, Hays comments: "When folly and mischief, assuming the venerable garb of religion and virtue, impose on the purest minds, and pervert the noblest characters, reason blushes, and humanity drops a tear" (vol. 1, 266-67). Hays is quick to point out that this type of perversion is not always irreversible. Of Susanna Hopton, Hays writes, "In the earlier periods of her life, Mrs. Hopton, by the artifices and arguments of father Turberville, a Romish priest, been induced to embrace the catholic faith; but as her understanding improved, and her knowledge increased, she became sensible of the fallacy of the reasoning by which she had been seduced, and returned to the religion of her ancestors" (vol. iv, 438). With knowledge and enlightenment comes a turning away from the seduction of Catholicism. Hays's tone is intolerant and condescending. As a Rational Dissenter, she felt it was

imperative for religious beliefs to be strengthened by a thorough rational examination.

Hays's tone in Female Biography ranges from impassioned defences of women of achievement, to the intolerance and condescension shown above. It can also take on the chatty or conspiratorial tone of a storyteller. She begins the entry for Emma, Queen of England with, "A story which is told of this princess ... savours, it must be confessed, of romance and fable" (IV, 313). Another example of this enthusiasm for her subject is the beginning of Eponina: "The following little history has in it something so peculiarly interesting and affecting, that it can scarcely be read without the most lively emotion" (IV, 317).

One of the entries where Hays's enthusiasm is converted into long-windedness is that of Catherine II. Taken largely from the Secret Memoirs of the Court of Petersburg, and from the Life of Catherine II, this entry takes up over 400 pages, bridging two volumes. Hays explains, "there are few reigns more interesting ... or that more forcibly tend to awaken reflection" (vol ii, 271). All Hays's purposes are served in this one entry: education by providing information, examples, and warning; and recording and celebrating achievements. "Whatever may have been her faults, and doubtless they were great, her genius, her talents, her courage, and her success, must ever entitle her to a high rank among women whose qualities and attainments have thrown a lustre on their sex" (vol. ii, 270-71). Her enthusiasm for this particular subject is obvious and accounts for the extraordinary length of the entry.

The reception of Female Biography was mixed, often within the same review. Hays was praised for the "taste, good sense, and judgment" (British Critic, 22, 94) of the work, while being taken to task for her still-present radical leanings. The British Critic reviewer writes, "The name of the editor must be familiar to our readers; and the whimsicality of her principles and opinions, to use no harsher term, we have before reprobated. The same unfortunate bias predominates in this work, and there is a great deal indeed, if we were disposed to be severe, that we might animadvert upon in strong terms of censure ..." (vol. 22, 93-94). Not surprisingly, because of the reviewers' familiarity with her and because of her known opinions on virtue and morality, many of Hays's choices of subjects led to criticism of the dictionary on moral grounds. The reviewer in the Monthly Review feels some entries could have been omitted, "especially where the moral conduct of the parties is not calculated to win the youthful fair to the cause of virtue" (vol. 43, 1804, 92). He also criticizes the inclusion of some of the more questionable females, saying their faults should be "specified only to be condemned" (92). The reviewer does not reveal who these questionable females are, nor what their faults are.

As I have noted, even the reviews negative in tone had some praise for Female Biography, and it can be labelled a success in terms of providing her with literary and financial rewards. It "proved to be her distinguishing achievement" as evidenced by its constant inclusion in the nineteenth century biographical dictionaries' lists of Hays's literary production, in contrast to her other works, which were not always

included by name (Luria, 1972, 15-16). Its archival value in women's history is undeniable. In her 1982 biographical reclamation project, Women of Ideas (And What Men Have Done to Them): From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich, Dale Spender makes use of Hays's biography when writing of early feminists and intellectuals.

The success of Female Biography explains in part why Hays later undertook a similar, but more limited, biographical project . At "the request of the publishers that I would select, compress, and compile, from the records of female eminence and worth, a memoir of Queens only, illustrious for their great qualities, or celebrated for their endowments and fortunes" (Preface to Memoirs of Queens, v), she reworked her Female Biography into the 1821 Memoirs of Queens. Much of her emphasis and concerns in the former work, such as the learning for common women, would be lost in this new volume. She however, explains that "Having more than once taken up my pen, how humble soever its efforts may have been, in the cause, and for the honour and advancement, of my sex; and having deeply at heart, as connected with the welfare of the human species, and of society at large, the moral rights and intellectual advancement of women, [she] acceded gratefully" to the requests of the publishers (Preface, v).

Hays extracted the entries on queens from Female Biography and added 16 more histories, including that of Caroline, wife of George IV of England. Caroline had lately been on trial at her husband's insistence for adultery and much had been made of her rumoured immorality and indiscretions. By including her in this collection, which was to honour

and advance the female sex, Hays is making clear her opinions on the scandal. These opinions are consistent with her earlier criticisms of the institutions of chastity and marriage, and the importance of all men conducting themselves by the same rules of conduct and virtue, by which they expect women to live.

Another new subject was Marie Antionette, whom Hays praises for her "dignity, self-possession, and firmness" at her trial (398) during the French Revolution. Thirty years after her first involvement with the circle of English Jacobins, Hays takes this opportunity to express her opinion regarding revolution, an opinion which we can assume has solidified with contemplation: "In revolutionary periods, that is, in times when all the passions and all the interests of mankind are excited and involved, the mild voice of reason and of truth are overwhelmed in uproar" (402). Yet, Hays does not condemn revolution altogether, only cautions that even in revolutionary times it would be best if reason were attended to. If the reforms Hays supported were manifested in society by reason, presumably revolution would no longer be necessary.

Considering the censure she faced as a feminist and Jacobin, Hays's consistency in and strength of her beliefs is admirable. In all her writing — the essays, the short moral tales, her novels, her polemic Appeal, and her biographical collections — she details her philosophy.

Her lasting and strong belief in this philosophy can be found in her own words in the preface to her last work, Memoirs of Queens:

> I maintain, and, while strength and reason remain to me, ever will maintain, that there is, there can be, but *one moral standard of excellence for mankind*, [her emphasis] whether male or female, and that the licentious distinctions made by the domineering party, in the spirit of tyranny, selfishness, and sensuality, are at the foundation of the heaviest evils that have afflicted, degraded, and corrupted society (vi).

Hays here refers back to her own personal adaptation of Godwin's ideas. The moral growth of society is directly connected to the moral growth of humankind. Individual improvement is useless without a corresponding societal reform; both are necessary and desirable. Progress, however, can not occur until men admit and relinqish their roles in the corrupt institutions of society as they are.

Hays's criticisms of society's corruption were, of course, focussed on those areas directly affecting women. She believed strongly in the power of rational enquiry and candour in the face of society's insincerity and hypocrisy. She also believed in passion or sensibility as a source of power for women. This was an essential element of the message she delivered in her novels. She felt this emotional power was linked to intellectual strength, a development of which would in turn inevitably lead to an enlightened view of society and its faults. This enlightenment or awareness was the first step in advocating and effecting the reform of those faults. From the position of her own awareness, Hays attacked the hypocrisy governing customs of courtship and rules of chastity, as arenas particularly damaging to women.

In her non-fiction writing, Hays feminist concern was largely with education. She claimed women's intellectual equality with men, and argued convincingly for improvements in the education of women. In doing so, she refuted traditional arguments and presented concrete solutions. In her moral tales and essays, as in her biographical dictionaries, she was concerned with educating her female readers. With the biographical collections, she was also involved in her own feminist project of reclaiming and celebrating women's achievements. Hays successfully used these different literary productions as vehicles for her political and feminist purposes. As such, her various works constitute a substantial and admirable contribution to the feminist discussions and ideas of her time, as well as to those since. Mary Hays's effective synthesis of the influences of her religious and social background, the events of the time in which she lived, her contemporaries and friends, and her own considerable thoughts and opinions, resulted in a thorough feminist philosophy which demands consideration.

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